

Outline for a Class-Conscious Gig Workers Movement

By the Johnson City New Labor Committee



App-based delivery drivers strike in Brazil (Credit: Rafael Vilela, 2020)

Introduction

Earlier this year in April, thousands of gig workers, mainly delivery drivers, organized a massive strike across at least 59 cities and 19 capitals in Brazil¹. This was their biggest gig worker strike since the #BrequeDosApps (#AppBrake) movement in 2020, which saw thousands strike all across Latin America². Fighting for demands like increased base-pay and travel-pay, workers rallied in the streets and shut down commerce, blocking orders from being received or picked-up. Restaurants operating exclusively with iFood, the Dutch-based monopoly controlling 80% of Brazil's food-delivery sector, experienced a 100% drop in deliveries, proving the Brazilian drivers' strength against scabs and strike-breakers. Liga Operaria, the class-conscious trade union center in Brazil, notes that "App-based delivery drivers (iFood, Uber Flash, and 99 Entrega, among others) are one of the most precarious sectors. Without labor rights or any social security, they risk their lives in grueling workdays that often exceed 12 hours a day!"

The question of a class-conscious labor line, in theory and practice, is one that fundamentally determines the direction of the trade union movement, and the mass movement more broadly, as it answers whether our movements and organizations are to spend their lives tailing the political economy of capitalism, or if the working class itself is to march at the head of its own movement and revolution.

¹ Liga Operaria, "Long Live the National Strike of App-Based Delivery Drivers!" <https://ligaoperaria.org.br/2025/04/25/viva-a-greve-nacional-dos-entregadores-por-aplicativos/> (unfortunately it seems like this website is no longer accessible)

² Vice News, "'They Aren't Anything Without Us': Gig Workers Are Striking Throughout Latin America," <https://www.vice.com/en/article/they-arent-anything-without-us-gig-workers-are-striking-throughout-latin-america/>

As a more recent sector of the proletariat, modern gig workers have only started to realize our potential for both spontaneity and class-consciousness, with the Latin American strikes being emblematic of that fact. Gig-sector employment is defined by labor that is untethered from physical means of production owned by a company, instead being formally owned by us, and coordinated through the medium of a smartphone app. Unlike other transport and domestic workers who have no consistent workplace, we have no local agencies or physical infrastructure to act as stop-points between sequences of work. We have a production environment that is entirely fluid and based on the inconsistency of supply and demand across an entire geographic locale. Because of our misclassification as independent contractors, gig workers in the U.S. are excluded from concessions like a federal minimum-wage, overtime pay, collective bargaining rights, employer-paid taxes, and unemployment insurance. We are subjected to highly precarious industrial conditions built around digital-communications technology to meet the anarchy of local supply and demand. The fact that, nominally, we could make upwards of \$5-10 more per hour than what formally-employed workers in similar industries make is contradicted by only 30-50% or less³ of our wage actually going to costs of living, the other proportion going strictly to costs of production that, unlike most other workers, we are forced to bear up-front.

Our unique instability is paralleled by our unique professional separation from other workers. We simply do not have any formal, or functional, co-workers to speak of, and our “shop-floor” is nothing but the geographic locale we reside in. This presents gig workers, those genuinely untethered from a formal workplace, with the task of organizing our own sectoral organizations and movement distinct from those similar sub-industrial organizations tied to physical capital.

In the U.S., there are currently two dominant tendencies in the gig workers movement: state-unionism⁴ and semi-independent unionism. As these terms imply, state-unionism embodies a labor movement wholly dependent upon the capitalist State for its existence, contracting, and funding, being opposed to the class-interests of the proletariat and fully entrenched in the maintenance of imperialism. The California Gig Workers Union perfectly represents this tendency by limiting their activity to advocating for the re-classification of gig workers as W-2 employees so they can become sanctioned by the reactionary U.S. Government. Most recently, as an affiliate of the SEIU, they have succeeded in colluding with Uber/Lyft to produce bill AB 1340, recently signed into law by Gavin Newsom, which creates a new system of California-based state-unionism, directly tied to the Governorship, outside of the NLRB. This treacherous compromise went to so far as to legalize company unions for gig workers (“unions” controlled by employers). Rather than fighting for the creation of a general industrial union, local shop-organizations, and the realization of a basic economic program *independent* of the bourgeois State, the CGWU ties all progress to recognition and absorption by its apparatus.

This type of union is not the enforcer of the proletariat’s demands, it is its middle-manager and arbitrary legal counsel. We do not, in fact, require any specific legal classification to organize around industry standards like the right to strike or a \$30/hr minimum wage. While re-classification is absolutely an

³ Human Rights Watch, *The Gig Trap: Algorithmic, Wage and Labor Exploitation in Platform Work in the US*, p. 84, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/05/12/the-gig-trap/algorithmic-wage-and-labor-exploitation-in-platform-work-in-the-us>

⁴ “In this analysis, the establishment unions are not the ‘basic organizations of the workers’, fundamentally proletarian structures, but with an upper layer of reactionary labor aristocrats controlling them which must be driven out. Instead, the once ‘basic organizations of the proletariat’ have become incorporated into the bourgeois state itself, and are now tied at the hip with the bourgeoisie through their state apparatus. As in fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, these ‘unions’ are now more like domesticated state-sanctioned workers associations rather than the spontaneous creations of ‘free labor’ as Marx described them. While the majority of their members are still workers, the state unions derive their structure, leadership, and legitimacy from the bourgeois state’s administrative apparatus and legal system, not from the workers themselves, their supposed ‘membership.’” — Southern New England Labor Council, *State Unionism in the US*, pp. 6-7, https://newlaborpress.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/final_on_us_state_unionism.pdf

immediate demand to fight for, one that, however, doesn't even raise our standards above the norm for most workers, tying union activity to recognition by the capitalist State is tantamount to liquidating the trade union struggle altogether. On the other hand, we have independent organizations like Rideshare Drivers United, also in California, and Tennessee Driver's Union in Nashville that have no concrete political line regarding opposition to or acceptance of state-unionism, being more classically economistic in their approach by prioritizing economic struggles over the political struggle against state-unionism and the bourgeoisie in general. That being said, they are far more capable of genuinely organizing gig workers and assisting in the revival of the labor movement due to their current independence from the State.

However, without a class-conscious labor line that explicitly opposes state-unionism, their tactics are extremely limited and inevitably tail bourgeois spontaneity, which can very easily lead to the liquidation of trade-unionism altogether if they see state-unionism as beneficial to their economism. This is precisely what happened with the opportunistic Amazon Labor Union when it betrayed their rank-and-file in favor of class-collaboration with the Teamsters⁵.

Along with the ideology of class-consciousness, a revolutionary political orientation, a class-combative program and set of tactics, the gig workers movement also requires certain organizational principles to truly come into its own, the main one being its geographic-based construction. Because we have no workplace or local professional agency, our organizations will start at the geographic-level where the supply and demand for our services is scattered throughout, but still concentrated enough to net surplus value and profit for our enterprises.

Another organizational principle is that of a distinction between gig workers with no workplace and similar laborers in a formal working environment, both at a local and sub-industrial point of production. This comes from the industrial understanding that similar forms of concrete labor and divisions of labor are often organized differently across different industries, sub-industries, sectors, enterprises, and workplaces. Industrial and trade unions must be based on real social relations and not arbitrary labor/skill divisions. The basic unit of a union must reflect the actual production process and how different laborers within similar contexts become a component of that.

For example, the difference in concrete labor between a Domino's delivery driver and an Uber Eats driver is really down to the variability of the merchants and products we interact with, and thus the frequency of our labor, but they are virtually identical in terms of the skill and labor power required. That being said, any worker at Domino's is part of the *sub-industry* of food service, so they have a *definite workplace* they belong to. We would not advocate for the construction of a "delivery driver's union" that would split a Domino's shop-organization into different "crafts" just so we could include them with workers in a similar division of labor, but in an entirely distinct production-process. Similarly, Amazon Flex Drivers also exert identical skill and labor power as other gig drivers, and are even organized in a similar way through a smartphone app, but Flex Drivers, like other Amazon workers, belong to the *logistics* industry, rather than the *service* industry, and are formally attached to the parcel *sub-industry*, not the *gig-sector*. This is seen in the fact they are still tied to a specific warehouse or distribution center which sees their sequence of labor as one that follows a string of other logistics work.

Gig workers in the gig-sector, on the other hand, are the last front of the *service industry*, providing consumer services tied to locally-limited markets, but because they are not tied to a specific workplace, they cannot be categorized into this or that sub-industry as there is no professional

⁵ New Day at Amazon, Edition #5, <https://newdayatamazon.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/nd-at-az-edition-5.pdf>

(social) basis for it. It is composed of various sub-sectors like delivery, rideshare, and domestic work, but just like we wouldn't split a workplace into craft unions based on different divisions of labor, neither should we split the gig workers movement based on these sub-sectors, especially when unions themselves have the ability to establish specific departments of work.

The creation of the gig-sector, and the "gigification" of labor in general, reflects a much broader tendency for capital to be more and more invested in technology at the expense of labor. While capitalists must also invest more in labor as time goes on, the reduction of this proportion in relation to technology results in the relative and absolute expansion of what Marx calls the "relative surplus population⁶." He states:

"The increase of the variable part of capital [wages], and therefore of the number of labourers employed by it, is always connected with violent fluctuations and transitory production of surplus population, whether this takes the more striking form of the repulsion of labourers already employed, or the less evident but not less real form of the more difficult absorption of the additional labouring population through the usual channels⁷."

At the same time as a downward pressure towards worse and worse living standards is forced upon these workers, upward pressure on the more stably-employed coerces them into working harder, and for less, for fear of downward mobility⁸. This competition inevitably results in the general worsening of living and working conditions for the working class.

In particular, because gig workers are employed for a below-subsistence, if not below-minimum, wage, we are part of the "stagnant section" of the relative surplus population. Marx defines this stratum as "a part of the active labour army, but with extremely irregular employment. Hence it furnishes to capital an inexhaustible reservoir of disposable labour power. Its conditions of life sink below the average normal level of the working class; this makes it at once the broad basis of special branches of capitalist exploitation⁹." The modern gig-sector can perfectly be described as a "special branch of capitalist exploitation," due to the peculiarity of the organizational, commercial, technological, and professional conditions of app-based "gigs," and gig workers can be perfectly described as "an inexhaustible reservoir of disposable labour power" due to our straddling position between the active and reserve armies of labor. Capitalists would have no supply of gig-labor if it wasn't for our exclusion from full-time or regular employment and from a subsistence wage in general.

The true extent of the relative surplus population in the U.S. may never be fully known, as its lowest stratum, the lumpenproletariat¹⁰, remains largely unaccounted for in all available statistics. Furthermore, the only accurate number given in terms of the "labor force," the denominator needed to calculate these proportions, is not differentiated by class, and would require a meticulous composition of existing data to generate a wholly proletarian statistic. What we do know is that official statistics on unemployment are extremely limited in their scope, only including citizens

⁶ A.k.a. the "industrial reserve army;" the unemployed or underemployed.

⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, p. 442, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf>

⁸ "The industrial reserve army, during the periods of stagnation and average prosperity, weighs down the active labour-army; during the periods of over-production and paroxysm, it holds its pretensions in check. Relative surplus population is therefore the pivot upon which the law of demand and supply of labour works. It confines the field of action of this law within the limits absolutely convenient to the activity of exploitation and to the domination of capital (IBID., pp. 445-446)."

⁹ IBID., p. 448

¹⁰ Those who are chronically unemployed and forced into pauperism (begging) for a living. Marx states, "Pauperism is the hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the industrial reserve army (IBID)." Tipping, for example, is a form of pauperism tied to active labor.

eligible for unemployment benefits, and so they vastly underestimate the true proportion of the reserve army of labor and relative surplus population. For example, the official unemployment rate in August was 4.3% but a closer estimate of underemployment in general would be 24.7%¹¹, as this includes part-timers who want to work full-time but can't, as well as gig workers, but even this is a conservative estimate. Recent developments in the U.S. welfare-state, like the temporary halt of SNAP benefits and the slashing of ACA subsidies, however, will soon reveal how truly decrepit our economy is, how much it is bolstered by government subsidies extracted from taxes and super-profits. At the same time as this pushes the masses closer to rebellion, it also intensifies the competition among the working class as the aforementioned downward and upward pressures lose this welfare "buffer-zone".

It is through trade unionism that the workers organize as one against the exploitative trends of capitalism, including the "law of competition". This is why in the non-semi-feudal nations trade unionism forms the axis on which the united proletarian front is constructed. As Marx states:

"Capital works on both sides at the same time. If its accumulation, on the one hand, increases the demand for labour, it increases on the other the supply of labourers by the 'setting free' of them, whilst at the same time the pressure of the unemployed compels those that are employed to furnish more labour, and therefore makes the supply of labour, to a certain extent, independent of the supply of labourers. The action of the law of supply and demand of labour on this basis completes the despotism of capital. As soon, therefore, as the labourers learn the secret, how it comes to pass that in the same measure as they work more, as they produce more wealth for others, and as the productive power of their labour increases, so in the same measure even their function as a means of the self-expansion of capital becomes more and more precarious for them; as soon as they discover that the degree of intensity of the competition among themselves depends wholly on the pressure of the relative surplus population; as soon as, by Trades' Unions, &c., they try to organise a regular co-operation between employed and unemployed in order to destroy or to weaken the ruinous effects of this natural law of capitalistic production on their class, so soon capital and its sycophant, Political Economy, cry out at the infringement of the 'eternal' and so to say 'sacred' law of supply and demand. Every combination of employed and unemployed disturbs the 'harmonious' action of this law. But, on the other hand, as soon as (in the colonies, e.g.) adverse circumstances prevent the creation of an industrial reserve army and, with it, the absolute dependence of the working class upon the capitalist class, capital, along with its commonplace Sancho Panza, rebels against the 'sacred' law of supply and demand, and tries to check its inconvenient action by forcible means and State interference¹²."

Just like the competition among employees, competition between the employed, unemployed, and semi-employed destroys our movement and weakens whatever concessions or protections we've won in the past. Workers must find creative ways to unite all sections of their class into political and economic organizations of rebellion. But as Marx states, this activity will inevitably bring the ire of the State upon us, and we must resist its machinations through protracted struggle. It is impossible for the working class to gain or maintain leverage over capital without political independence from the ruling class and its State.

Although the need for broad unemployed and homeless organizations speaks for itself, encompassing multiple strata of both the active and reserve armies of labor¹³, these organizations

¹¹ Ludwig Institute for Shared Economic Prosperity, "True Rate of Unemployment," <https://www.lisep.org/tru>

¹² Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, p. 446

¹³ It is a big mistake, for example, to metaphysically define all homeless or unsheltered people as lumpenproletarian, even if

will not do anything to prevent the hemorrhaging of working class solidarity by capital accumulation unless connected to trade unions. By this, we mean the inclusion of both formally laid-off workers and informally-employed workers in the active labor struggle and trade-unionism. Through participation in unique sectoral organizations belonging to broader industrial organizations, as well as unemployed detachments of specific locals, the lowest strata of the proletariat will learn that simply searching for a new job is not a long-term solution and just reproduces the competition that has caused all of this in the first place.

Regardless of legal and professional status, regardless of the skill or variability of one's labor, workers, in whatever position they may find themselves in, must struggle to increase their living and working standards not only to the level attained by the highest stratum of the working class, but beyond this level entirely. The struggle to go beyond the status-quo and towards certain minimums that raise the standards of the entire working class above any standard previously will not only prove fruitful in short-term concessions, but will ultimately expose the need to go beyond capitalism itself. For gig workers, we must seek to abolish not only the competition amongst ourselves, but also the competition between us and the rest of the working class, in the struggle to abolish exploitation altogether. That is why we say: "Workers and oppressed people of the world, unite!"

Conditions of Gig-Workers in the U.S.

By 2021, the digital "gigification" of labor saw a six-fold increase in online labor platforms since 2010¹⁴, mainly dominated by service-based companies like Uber, DoorDash, and Instacart, but spreading across multiple industries like logistics with Amazon Flex and "freelance" entertainment with Upwork. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that upwards of 10.2% of the U.S. labor-force, or 15 million people, are "electronically-mediated" gig workers¹⁵. Uber, by far the biggest gig-platform in the U.S, currently has a market capitalization of \$195.66 billion, almost a five-fold increase since its starting cap of \$46.17 billion in 2019¹⁶. With its 76% market share in the ridesharing sector¹⁷, and a decent chunk of the food delivery market, it had a revenue of \$43.9 billion and a net income of \$9.8 billion in 2024¹⁸. DoorDash, the largest food delivery service in the U.S with a 67% market share¹⁹, has seen a ten-fold increase in revenue from \$885 million in 2019 to \$10.72 billion in 2024²⁰. Just this quarter they had a cost of revenue of \$1.687 billion and a gross profit of \$1.759

they may engage in similar forms of pauperism like street-begging, petty thievery, or even prostitution. A 2021 study from the University of Chicago found that 53% of those living in homeless shelters and 40% of people without shelter were employed (<https://endhomelessness.org/blog/employed-and-experiencing-homelessness-what-the-numbers-show/>). Despite their living conditions being on par with lumpenproletarians, they are in fact part of the active army of labor, while still being in the relative surplus population like gig workers. This proves that lumpenproletarians *are* proletarians, just those who are chronically excluded from production.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, *The Gig Trap: Algorithmic, Wage and Labor Exploitation in Platform Work in the US*, p. 1, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/05/12/the-gig-trap/algorithmic-wage-and-labor-exploitation-in-platform-work-in-the-us>

¹⁵ Bloomberg News, "America's Gig Economy Workforce Holds Steady Around 10% of Total," [bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-11-08/america-s-gig-economy-workforce-holds-steady-around-10-of-total](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-11-08/america-s-gig-economy-workforce-holds-steady-around-10-of-total)

¹⁶ Macrotrends, "Uber Technologies Market Cap 2017-2025|UBER," <https://www.macrotrends.net/stocks/charts/UBER/uber-technologies/market-cap>

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, *The Gig Trap: Algorithmic, Wage and Labor Exploitation in Platform Work in the US*, p. 9, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/05/12/the-gig-trap/algorithmic-wage-and-labor-exploitation-in-platform-work-in-the-us>

¹⁸ Uber Investor, "Uber Announces Results for Fourth Quarter and Full Year 2024," <https://investor.uber.com/news-events/news/press-release-details/2025/Uber-Announces-Results-for-Fourth-Quarter-and-Full-Year-2024/default.aspx>

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, *The Gig Trap: Algorithmic, Wage and Labor Exploitation in Platform Work in the US*, p. 9, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/05/12/the-gig-trap/algorithmic-wage-and-labor-exploitation-in-platform-work-in-the-us>

²⁰ DoorDash, "DoorDash Releases Fourth Quarter and Full Year 2024 Financial Results," <https://ir.doordash.com/news/news-details/2025/DoorDash-Releases-Fourth-Quarter-and-Full-Year-2024-Financial-Results/default.aspx>

billion²¹, meaning they gained in revenue over *twice* what they paid their workers to cover both costs of production and costs of living. Gig workers in general get substantially more from tips than they do from the companies themselves. Almost 70% of Dasher pay-outs in 2024 were from tips²². This is nothing more than corporate pauperism responsible for the bulk of our wage.

Despite the massive earnings and profits of these gig-platforms, gig workers are some of the most exploited sections of the working class. We are denied everything from a minimum wage to basic labor protections and benefits like the right to unionize and over-time pay. On top of this, we are forced to bear all work-related expenses ourselves, including both employee and employer taxes on things like Social Security, and income taxes on *all* earnings, unlike W-2 employees who get to automatically deduct thousands of dollars. A survey of gig workers in Texas, conducted by Human Rights Watch and published in *The Gig Trap: Algorithmic, Wage and Labor Exploitation in Platform Work in the US*, reveals many of the implications of working for these platforms. They found a median wage of just \$5.12/hr, after accounting for costs of production and employer-taxes, which is 30% below the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 and 70% below the estimated living wage of a singular Texan (\$16.75)²³. It is no wonder why 75% of survey respondents “struggled to afford housing in the last year” and 50% “struggled to afford food, groceries, electricity, and water²⁴.”

Because of costs of production, only estimates of which go to determine our wage, there is a big disparity between what we are nominally-paid vs. what we actually have to spend on our living expenses, i.e., on our reproduction as individual laborers. A survey in Seattle found that the average nominal wage for rideshare drivers, including tips, was \$21.53/hr, slightly higher than the city’s minimum wage of \$19.97/hr but lower than the estimated living wage of \$28.70/hr. However, after subtracting work expenses and taxes, workers were only left with a real wage of \$9.73/hr (including tips) to spend on living expenses²⁵. These wages aren’t even comparable to servers who might have a below-minimum hourly wage but rely mainly on tips. These are wages that shouldn’t even legally exist, comparable to *undocumented* workers who can’t even engage in app-based gig work. Not merely below-subsistence, but *below-minimum* wages are standard for gig workers all over the world. In Chile, a study by the International Labor Organization estimated that “platform delivery workers earned nearly 900 pesos (about \$1.24) less per hour compared to traditional delivery workers who are employees,” despite working an average of 62 hours a week when their employee-counterparts worked only 45²⁶. A survey of more than 500 workers in the U.K “found that half of respondents reported wages below the minimum standards for employees.” As mentioned earlier, Brazilian drivers often work 12-hour days “without labor rights or any social security.”

One of the most deplorable costs forced onto U.S. gig workers solely due to our arbitrary legal classification is the additional tax and benefit expenditures that would normally be paid by our employer. These include contributions like social security, medicare, unemployment insurance, workers’ compensation, additional retirement plans, health insurance premiums, life and disability insurance, family and medical leave, hazard pay, and over-time pay. In 2023, the average amount of total remuneration from employers to employees was \$40.79/hr, 70.5% in wages and 29.5% in

²¹ DoorDash, “DoorDash Releases Third Quarter 2025 Financial Results,” <https://ir.doordash.com/news/news-details/2025/DoorDash-Releases-Third-Quarter-2025-Financial-Results/default.aspx>

²² Estimated by subtracting cost of revenue (wages in this case) from total Dasher pay-outs (\$18 billion according to FY2024 report) and dividing this sum by the latter. $(18B - 5.542B) / 18B = 69.2\%$

²³ Human Rights Watch, *The Gig Trap: Algorithmic, Wage and Labor Exploitation in Platform Work in the US*, p. 3, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/05/12/the-gig-trap/algorithmic-wage-and-labor-exploitation-in-platform-work-in-the-us>

²⁴ IBID.

²⁵ IBID., p. 74

²⁶ IBID., p. 78

benefits (including tax-expenses)²⁷. Applying the IRS metric for average expenses/mile results in an average hourly expense of \$9.37²⁸, Human Rights Watch was able to calculate that from an average hourly total remuneration rate of \$16.90 for 127 respondents in Texas, they would've been left with just \$7.53 post-production and only \$5.12 for living expenses not usually covered by employers²⁹.

As a gig-worker myself, this is something I and my fellow workers experience on a personal level daily. For example, on a given day as a DoorDash worker, I was paid \$33.00 for 1.5 hours of "active" work (only going to restaurants and customers) and 3 hours for total work (including all time I spent waiting for or doing orders). Despite this, I ended up racking-up around \$40 in IRS estimated expenses from the close to 60 miles I drove in total, mileage I only spent in the context of DoorDash. This is not even counting extra tax or "benefit" expenses, meaning that I would have had to make up for this elsewhere to even reach a positive wage that I could spend on myself.

Gig-companies take advantage of the fact that we don't pay all of our expenses at once, daily, weekly, or monthly, to often times pay us below even costs of production, knowing we'll have to make up for it with more labor. At the same time, they don't even have to worry about the bulk of costs of production because this can be largely, if not fully, covered by tips. With our DoorDash example from earlier, customers realistically covered most if not all of our work-expenses with their 70% tip margin³⁰. It is basically indeterminable how much these gig-companies save by not directly covering costs of production, or not accurately remunerating workers to do so (like at minimum, providing the IRS expense rate in addition to a living wage³¹), but researchers have been able to calculate the savings these companies get from *not* paying employer-taxes or benefit contributions. Human Rights Watch found that Texans lost "more than \$111 million in forgone Unemployment Insurance (UI) contributions between 2020 and 2022 due to the misclassification of platform workers," and researchers at Berkeley estimate these companies "would owe \$413 million to California's Unemployment Insurance (UI) fund for 2014 to 2019³²."

Abusing the independent contract system is a key tactic in the larger strategy of "gigifying" the service industry which involves massive investments in digital software, algorithmic, and surveillance technology to individually determine pay-rates and dispatch-routes as a means of minimizing labor-costs (and implied employee-borne costs of production) and maximizing productivity (and thus profit³³) according to real-time supply and demand. This results in competition among gig workers defined by how well we can please the algorithm by maximizing our hours, indiscriminately choosing the worst-paid and highest-expense gigs, and chasing after various "incentive" and "rewards" programs knowing that the ease of gig-employment could mean we are replaced at any second. Even the liberal publications recognize this is a time-honored practice of capitalism, as Human Rights Watch explains:

"This business model requires vast computational resources and expansive access to worker and consumer data to manage and control fares, routes, compensation, and schedules. But

²⁷ IBID., p. 91

²⁸ IBID., p. 87

²⁹ IBID., p. 91

³⁰ In 2017, the U.S Department of Treasury estimated that gig-workers spent 70% of their income on work-expenses. (IBID., p. 84)

³¹ The NLOC Program (<https://newlaborpress.org/2025/08/01/nloc-unites-around-draft-program/>) calls for a \$30/hr minimum wage, so this would require either \$39.37/hr (before taxes and commissions) if we were in charge of work-expenses, or just \$30/hr if corporations absorbed those costs themselves.

³² IBID., p. 120

³³ Profit is a form of surplus-value, or unpaid labor, that is extracted from workers above what is paid in wages. Increasing productivity means workers remunerate their wage-costs faster and thus spend more time producing surplus-value.

many of the business and labor practices this model automates are hardly new. Just-in-time scheduling—matching workers to available work on demand—was developed by Japanese carmaker Toyota in the early 1970s to minimize manufacturing delays. Paying platform workers per gig harks back to an early 20th century labor practice that targeted immigrant women, who were paid per piece rather than by the hour to knit for garment manufacturers, and earned half what women factory workers made. Nonstandard employment—a hallmark of the digital platform economy—has been rising globally for decades³⁴.”

But not all labor is “gigified” equally. We see a massive disparity by both class and industry when it comes to the different online labor-platforms that exist. While service-based platforms rely on highly meticulous programs to generate individualized pay (commissions) and work-routes, Amazon Flex, a logistics platform, standardizes wages to a flat \$18-25/hr depending on location and generates work-routes in advance of, not during, the labor performed, allowing for a much lessened precarity in terms of pay, schedule, and expenses that is paralleled by the existence of a consistent and definite workplace. There are also various entertainment platforms like Upwork and Fiverr that allow freelance artists to find and sell to customers, services like YouTube and TikTok that allow content creators to generate ad-revenue and sponsor sales, and websites/apps like Etsy, Ebay, and Depop that give a place for resellers and small vendors to ship their goods. These are ostensibly small producer oriented platforms that do not involve the buying and selling of labor power³⁵, but of services and products, where creators can actually take advantage of their independent-contractor or small-business status to have control over what they can do and sell, and for how much.

We would not advocate for the involvement of these middle-class elements in a proletarian gig worker organization, neither should we seek to liquidate a workplace-based shop-organization for Amazon Flex workers in favor of conjoining them with the geographic shop-organizations of service-based gig workers. These are important distinctions to make in order to specify our analysis and practice.

All of these platforms collect extensive information regarding workers’ performance, productivity, and behavior:

“Uber, Lyft, Instacart, DoorDash, and Shipt specify that they collect precise location data about workers, such as their geolocation via GPS coordinates, when they are actively engaged with the app (e.g., on screen while looking for or completing a ride or a delivery) or letting it run in the background (e.g., when they may not be working but have not switched off the app). Shipt also activates location tracking on a worker’s device when they have scheduled a work shift in advance and their ‘planned work window is approaching,’ in order to dispatch geographically ‘relevant offers for potential deliveries.’ Favor and Amazon Flex collect precise location data, but do not specify when this collection starts and stops³⁶...

Amazon Flex, which requires workers to sign up for delivery shifts rather than specific deliveries, collects data that meticulously tracks their progress throughout a shift. From the time they report to their assigned warehouse, to when they pick up parcels, begin a delivery route, return from the route, and drop off undelivered parcels, Amazon workers’ behavior can be analyzed via time, date, and location. Amazon Flex also monitors whether workers

³⁴ IBID., p. 30

³⁵ This is the commodity workers sell to our employers for a wage because we have no access to the means of employing it ourselves. In return, our employers are granted ownership over all revenue (value) that is created (or transferred) from our labor. In the short-term, trade-unionism seeks better terms for the sale of this commodity, in addition to controlling an employer’s access to our labor, but in the long-term, the working class must seek to abolish this system of wage-slavery altogether and gain full control over the production-process we ourselves create.

³⁶ IBID., p. 45

are driving, walking, or running on a route, and when they are using ‘driver assistance technologies’ (such as autopilot mode)³⁷.”

But there is a big difference in collecting physical information about workers’ routes to *measure productivity* vs. collecting this information AND an enormous amount of subjective data like acceptance rates and customer ratings in order to *calculate wages*. As stated above, Amazon Flex standardizes their wages, whereas service-based platforms rely on immense calculus to determine how low they can pay their workers and have them keep working, how to limit higher-paying offers to the most productive workers, and which orders to dispatch to specific workers. Customer ratings serve no purpose other than providing an arbitrary reason to limit pay and deactivate workers. Acceptance rates, on the other hand, provide a mechanism to lower the standard for pay, preventing “pickier” workers from accessing higher-paying or more frequent orders, while motivating others to “race to the bottom³⁸” by indiscriminately accepting orders.

Because of the opaque and proprietary nature of these algorithms, and the general lack of control given to us over our labor, “workers cannot set or negotiate their rates for giving a ride or shopping and delivering an order, as a true independent contractor can³⁹.” So we are left fighting with an algorithm we have no proper understanding of for a below-subsistence rate that we cannot determine, even though it is up to us to cover *our own* costs of production. For reference, we will include what limited information we do have about these algorithms and how they determine our pay:

“Uber, which rolled out a new pay structure in February 2022 known as ‘Upfront Fares,’ which calculates drivers’ earnings based on an algorithmic assessment of factors such as estimated length and distance of the trip, the distance to pickup, and real-time demand at the destination. This dynamic, real-time formula was a major departure from its longstanding method of calculating fares based on fixed time and distance rates and applicable fare multipliers such as surge pricing. Uber declined to provide the full list of factors that guides the algorithm’s calculations.

Instacart, which calibrates the amount it pays shoppers for each ‘batch’ (the company’s term for an order or a group of orders) based on the ‘size and complexity’ of the orders in each batch. This pay model takes into account factors such as delivery time and distance, travel to pickup, and the presence of heavy grocery items. It is unclear what other factors guide the company’s assessment of ‘size and complexity.’ When the company announced these new pay features on July 20, 2023, it assured shoppers that its algorithmic pay calculations will not fall below a minimum base pay of \$4 for each batch. This minimum pay figure is a sharp decline from the \$7 to \$10 per batch minimum established in 2019. Before 2018, Instacart would pay a commission of \$1 to \$14 per order (depending on time and place), as well as a fee for each grocery item (usually around \$0.40)...

DoorDash, which offers workers the ability to toggle between two payment options. The ‘Earn per Offer’ mode calculates base pay on a per order basis, according to the ‘estimated time, distance and desirability of the order.’ The company declined to provide additional information about how it measures ‘desirability.’ The ‘Earn by Time’ mode, which was established in June 2023, provides workers a fixed hourly pay rate that varies according to location. The pay rate only covers active time (meaning the time between accepting the order and dropping it off), and does not cover wait time between orders. In ‘Earn by Time’

³⁷ IBID., pp. 46-47

³⁸ IBID., p. 60

³⁹ IBID., p. 50

mode, workers have little say over the orders they pick up, as they are permitted to decline only one offer per hour⁴⁰.”

Instead of using our *actual* costs of production and costs of living to remunerate us, these platforms combine subjective factors like “desirability” and objective factors like “time and distance” to find whatever pay will get someone to take the gig while, again, limiting one’s ability to reject these gigs and penalizing us for not fitting into algorithmic calculations *we have no access to*. This makes it impossible to reliably budget what little money we do get, much less calculate a fair compensation or union standard that would lessen our exploitation. For example, “Mary A., an Instacart shopper, said she usually works 10- to 12-hour days to hit her daily income goal of \$100. Some weeks, however, she averages only \$70 a day despite working the same amount. ‘I am behind my rent because of this,’ Mary said. ‘I have struggled since October [2020] to make enough money to keep a roof over my head.’ Jacob F. had a similar experience. ‘Some days I know I need to make X amount of money to pay a bill or pay rent, and I don’t make it. I’m not getting the shops or the tips. How do you go home and sleep?’⁴¹”

To further bolster productivity and please their algorithms, these gig-platforms also rely on a milieu of incentivization programs and tactics which are nothing less than a form of gambling with our time, labor, and production expenses:

“These techniques impact a worker’s earnings directly (by providing cash incentives to an individual upon the completion of a task) or indirectly (by prioritizing or de-prioritizing some workers over others for various ride or delivery requests)... Uber, for example, entices drivers to work in particular areas or stay on the road through ‘Surges’ (earnings multipliers for completing rides in areas with high demand) and ‘Quests’ (cash bonuses drivers attain when they complete a set number of rides within a specific time period)... Chasing surges can rack up time, mileage, and wear and tear on the driver’s car, increasing their work expenses with no guarantee of higher earnings⁴².”

There is enormous physical and financial risk to being a gig worker. Our enterprises do not require any sort of vehicle inspection to be employed, which they should of course have to pay for, and although they require auto insurance, which they should also pay for, they do not actually check to see if we have any. Because our costs of production are included in what’s already a meagre nominal-wage, it financially benefits us in the short-term to shirk regular car maintenance, if not insurance altogether, in order to increase the sum that goes to our costs of living, greatly increasing our long-term physical AND financial risk.

Neither is there a company expectation that we have a good enough car to work in hazardous conditions, but the poverty of gig-workers forces us out into these conditions despite potentially having an unsafe vehicle. Though this also includes the risk of crashing while delivering an order or even with a customer, that short-term cost is much more easily absorbed by the company, if at all, than the long-term cost of prioritizing driver safety. All of this risk is intentionally multiplied through the incentive schemes mentioned above, coercing drivers to increase their road-time or traverse longer distances, to drive in worse conditions when there is less competition, and to go places they wouldn’t normally go. For gig workers, securing better working conditions is literally a matter of life and death, because the question, under current circumstances, is not *if* we’ll crash or *if* we’ll run out of money, but *when*.

⁴⁰ IBID., pp. 50-53

⁴¹ IBID., pp. 53-54

⁴² IBID., p. 54

Under capitalism, trade unions are supposed to, at the minimum, negotiate better terms for the sale of our labor power⁴³ while controlling employers' access to our labor⁴⁴. Without these collective organizations, we are left as mere individuals in the face of the massive buying-power of corporations and forced to compete amongst ourselves in a "race" that only ever leads to the deflation of our wages. Just like bourgeois elections, we are presented with the illusion of choice between two candidates, one that gives you the prospect of working to survive until your death, the other that takes away this prospect altogether and forces you to beg on the streets.

These are contradictions, however, that can be resolved, but only if the working class overcomes its disunity in the face of capital. Unfortunately, there are some organizations that exist to give us the illusion that we *are* doing this, and then take advantage of our spontaneous tendency to organize and negotiate a better wage to, in actual effect, *subordinate us* to the needs of the ruling class and its State-apparatus⁴⁵. By relying on labor-law meant to deceive and manipulate us, as well as genuine concessions that are handed to us out of fear and/or struggle, state-unions like the AFL-CIO and Teamsters get to legitimize capitalism via propaganda, lobbying (bribery), and direct investments in return for the ability to use our dues-payments to line their own pockets⁴⁶. They will go so far as to call strikes, of course, giving time for the corporations to stock up on products and labor in preparation, just to realize a sell-out contract that provides terms only suitable to the employer⁴⁷ along with no-strike and managerial rights clauses that prevent the rank-and-file from having any control over their labor. In order to truly unite against capital, not just in the short-term struggle for better conditions but also in the long-term struggle for the wholesale abolition of capitalism, the working class requires independence from the capitalist State. But despite our recent existence, the strategy of state-unionism has already resulted in numerous failures for the gig workers movement.

The Failures of State-Unionism

It is unmistakably clear to most gig workers the contradiction that exists between the massive investments in the gig-sector and the overwhelming reliance on our labor vs. the sheer level of

⁴³ This can only occur by increasing our nominal wage (the price amount we are paid), our real wage (our nominal wage in relation to costs of living), and our relative wage (our nominal wage in relation to surplus-value). It is possible to increase our nominal wage while decreasing both our real wage (if inflation increases faster, which in most places it has) and our relative wage (if the rate of exploitation increases faster, which it also has). Fetishizing nominal wage increases falls right into the hands of the ruling class.

⁴⁴ Through control over disciplinary measures and policy, who gets fired, but at the minimum, through the ability to withhold our labor until demands are met.

⁴⁵ "The state is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. The state arises where, when and insofar as class antagonism objectively cannot be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable... According to Marx, the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another; it is the creation of 'order', which legalizes and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between classes." — V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, p. 4, <https://www.marxists.org/ebooks/lenin/state-and-revolution.pdf>

⁴⁶ "The AFT, AFSCME, UFCW, IBT, SEIU, and NEA have taken in a combined \$17,919,602,791 over the last decade. They have spent a total of \$151,594,007 on strike benefits, or 0.8% of their revenue, or about \$1.60 per member per year. This is compared to a whopping \$1,904,298,889 on "political activities and lobbying"—essentially just two billion robbed from the workers and handed over to the Democrats. Even this pales in comparison to the amount spent on investments and fixed assets, which totals \$2,849,336,932 over the last decade." — New Labor Press, *Political Economy of the American Labor Movement*, p. 13, https://newlaborpress.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/aug_2024_update_poleconlabormovement.pdf

⁴⁷ Although not coming out of a strike, one example of state-unions actually worsening these terms was IBT's anti-democratic "Memoranda of Understanding" during the COVID pandemic. In their third edition, *New Day at UPS* stated that the Memoranda "resulted in many of us making half what nonessential workers got from unemployment, and we were the ones working through horrendous conditions, not just disease but insane volume that resulted in constant hospitalizations in some buildings [our emphasis]." <https://newdayarchive.wordpress.com/2023/03/05/3rd-edition/>

poverty, exploitation, and political repression that is forced onto us by our employers and the State. This has seen a wave of spontaneous trade-unionism, and even class-consciousness, develop despite the infancy of our sector. Our Brazilian comrades have proven the potential of gig worker strikes, as they were able to block the commerce not only of their corporations (up to 100%!) but commerce *in general*. Although we haven't seen this level of action in the U.S. yet (a national strike), thousands if not hundreds of thousands of gig workers are awakening to the need of trade-unionism and have joined or created unions across the country. This potential strikes great fear into the hearts of gig-platforms, and the ruling class as a whole, because of our incredible ability to shut down commerce if that's what we decided. As such, our enemies have employed numerous tactics to prevent our organization altogether, or at least greatly limit what the rank-and-file can actually do. They currently rely on, above all else, our misclassification as independent contractors, stripping away not only basic working standards but also our legal right to unionize. This, however, is not stopping the gig workers movement. Instead, the ruling class also relies on the long-used tactics and strategy of state-unionism.

In a minority of cities around the U.S, specifically in California and the East Coast, some gig workers, mainly rideshare drivers, have become the victims of the SEIU, affiliate of America's largest state, police, and Zionist "union," AFL-CIO, and in other cities, the Teamsters, another notoriously corrupt state/police "union." The strategy of these "unions" is to reverse the effectiveness of trade-unionism by liquidating rank-and-file democracy and tying all demands, contracts, labor action, and even their existence, to certification by the Imperialist State. In response to the functional illegality of gig-unionism, the SEIU and Teamsters are deterring any form of labor action that might genuinely threaten gig-corporations and the State in favor of involuntary dues-collection⁴⁸ for lobbying (i.e., bribery). However, because they are relying on tactics dependent upon the NLRA/NLRB, which excludes independent contractors, they are severely limited in what even they can do. For example, their activity in the gig-sector is almost entirely limited to rideshare drivers in the largest Democratic cities. This is because they can easily recruit around large sites of congregation while having some level of formal or informal protection against the illegality of gig-unionism. But they only use this as a means to accumulate capital on behalf of the State and gig-corporations.

Although rideshare drivers in California were recently given the "right to unionize" with AB 1340, something that does not at all solve the illegality of this on a federal-level, this comes after the tremendous failure of Prop 22. Individual states actually have the ability to re-classify gig workers as the employees we really are, which would then give us access to *federal* concessions and rights. This is exactly what occurred in 2020 with AB5, which *did* re-classify California gig workers, giving them both the federal right to unionize, as well as all employee concessions that the vast majority of us are excluded from. Of course, this did not sit well with the gig-companies. Uber, Lyft, DoorDash, Instacart, and Postmates (before it was acquired by Uber) spent a combined total of \$230 million to reverse this bill with Prop 22⁴⁹, manipulating voters that *outnumbered* gig workers to strip them of the rights they were just granted. They relied on the fact that there was no effective counter-propaganda campaign nor strike campaign by the SEIU and CGWU to go from threatening to "pull out" of California entirely, to making claims of exorbitant price-increases to scare consumers. Any real union would have exposed these lies. No gig-corporation would "pull out" of the largest market in the U.S., and most price-inflation could easily be absorbed by them.

⁴⁸ Although they claim to collect dues voluntarily, what they actually do is tie membership or voting-rights to dues payments, which is the antithesis of voluntarism.

⁴⁹ Rideshare Drivers United, "About Us," <https://www.drivers-united.org/about-us>

This frenzied campaign showed just how much these corporations were afraid of the rank-and-file, and instead of tapping into this potential to call an indefinite strike, something that absolutely would've forced these corporations to back down, SEIU and CGWU let Prop 22 pass unchallenged. In fact, Rideshare Drivers United, an organization independent from the state unions, were the only ones to organize a strike in response to Prop 22, although four years after the fact as part of a wave of Valentine's Day gig worker strikes in 2024, and they also led a strike in the lead up to AB5 in 2019⁵⁰. On the contrary, CGWU and SEIU spent five years doing nothing but collecting dues so they could lobby California, Uber, and Lyft into producing the compromising AB 1340 which *only includes rideshare drivers* and does not even realize a contract. What it does is guarantee the monopoly over rideshare organizing in California that SEIU *already had*, and outlines a "process" for certification, decertification, and collective bargaining with California's Public Employment Relations Board. Like the NLRB, this board has the ability to reject union certification and bargaining contracts, a union must first be recognized as a union before its bargaining unit can even be certified, and the "covered" companies are not expected to uphold any contract or agreement unless it is approved by the board.

One of the biggest compromises found in this bill is that it formalizes *company unions*. These are puppet-organizations created by corporations to prevent workers from organizing independently of them, providing an army of scabs and strike-breakers, and they were actually made illegal, for classified employees, by the NLRA. In fact, Uber already has a company union, the "Independent Drivers Guild," that it actually created *in collaboration with* the AFL-CIO, SEIU's union, more specifically the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers⁵¹. AB 1340 defines a company union as "any committee, worker representation plan, or association of TNC⁵² drivers or others that exists for the purpose, in whole or in part, of dealing with TNCs concerning grievances or terms and conditions of work for TNC drivers, for which either or both of the following is true:

(A) A TNC has initiated or created the union, proposed its initiation or creation, participated in the formulation of its governing rules or policies, or participated in or supervised its management, operations, or elections.

(B) A TNC has maintained, financed, controlled, dominated, or assisted in maintaining or financing the union, unless required to do so by this chapter or any regulations implementing this chapter, whether by compensating anyone for services performed on its behalf or by donating free services, equipment, materials, office or meeting space, or anything else of value, or by any other means⁵³."

And instead of *forbidding* this type of organization, which the NLRA does for W-2 employees, it only prevents corporations from *requiring* "a TNC driver to join any company union" or discouraging/encouraging "membership in any company union," which are standards it applies to the state unions as well⁵⁴. Overall, the bill is pretty standard labor-law that any state-union bureaucracy and corporation would be familiar and comfortable with. Unlike the NLRA, however, there are no provisions for or even mentions of strikes, although it does define unfair labor practices. The only

⁵⁰ IBID.

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch, *The Gig Trap: Algorithmic, Wage and Labor Exploitation in Platform Work in the US*, p. 112-113, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/05/12/the-gig-trap/algorithmic-wage-and-labor-exploitation-in-platform-work-in-the-us>

⁵² TNC stands for "Transportation network company" like Uber and Lyft

⁵³ California Legislative Information, "Assembly Bill No. 1340," 7420.2, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202520260AB1340

⁵⁴ IBID., 7479.18, Section 5

possible implication here is that, because these workers are not protected by the NLRA, they do *not* have the right to strike under *any circumstances*. Nothing could reveal the treachery of the SEIU more.

How could any genuine working class organization allow the right to “unionize” without the right to strike? The strike is the primary weapon of trade-unionism and the only thing capable of guaranteeing control over the employment of our labor. The SEIU and CGWU have fully sold-out their workers by giving them an unnecessary bureaucracy that only justifies their existence and the ability for gig-corporations to exploit rideshare drivers without facing any serious consequences. Any contract that is produced from this system will undoubtedly be a sell-out contract that falls below the standards of even W-2 employment, all while preventing the rank-and-file from struggling for anything more.

On the other end of state-unionism, we have the Teamsters in Massachusetts and Washington. They, too, are simply tailing efforts at reclassification and absorption into reactionary state bureaucracies. In 2022, they helped pass a law that misclassified gig workers in Washington, albeit with some minimum pay guarantees and benefits like paid sick leave⁵⁵. This compromise was so bad, however, that even the National Headquarters of Teamsters rejected it. Local 25 in Boston failed to get a similar bill passed in Massachusetts that would’ve protected “union members from having their compensation and benefits undercut by employers by extending collective bargaining rights to workers at app-based companies⁵⁶.” Although MA has stricter laws regarding employee classification, to the point that Uber and Lyft have been forced to provide minimum standards by the courts, the majority of gig workers in MA are still misclassified. Most state-unions are now left beating around the bush on the classification issue, while still not addressing the wealth of other issues affecting us like costs of production. They are forced to rely on the tactics and strategy of an almost century-old labor law that does not even apply to our sector, and as a result, have passed or supported only pale imitations of it on the state-level.

Of course, the “fight” on the federal-level is even worse, as that would set standards for all states and all workers, not just the ones already dominated by state-unions. The one attempt at addressing the misclassification issue on the federal-level was the PRO Act, but even then, it only proposed the right to unionization and none of the other benefits accorded to W-2 employees. This bill failed at the Senate in 2021, despite Democrats having majority-control, and failed both the House and the Senate in 2023⁵⁷. Ultimately, the treachery of the state-unions, their eager willingness to do nothing but collude with these ruling parties and corporations, will result in no fundamental changes for the conditions of gig workers. They are failing the majority of us by only targeting large cities and rideshare drivers, and they are failing all of us by preventing any higher-level of organization like strikes, or even a basic shop-committee system, that could actually bend the knee of capital. Their limitation on the classification issue also demonstrates that they simply do not care that we have no control over production, our own labor, and only want the law to *better reflect that fact*. Re-classification is the smallest of minimum demands to raise gig workers to the level *that every employee is already at*. We have to go far beyond that if we want to raise our living standards, much less exercise control over production.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch, *The Gig Trap: Algorithmic, Wage and Labor Exploitation in Platform Work in the US*, p. 41, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/05/12/the-gig-trap/algorithmic-wage-and-labor-exploitation-in-platform-work-in-the-us>

⁵⁶ Teamsters, “New Report on Gig Worker Pay Supports Teamsters Push For Misclassification Reforms,” <https://teamster.org/2024/05/new-report-on-gig-worker-pay-supports-teamsters-push-for-misclassification-reforms/>

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch, *The Gig Trap: Algorithmic, Wage and Labor Exploitation in Platform Work in the US*, p. 108, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/05/12/the-gig-trap/algorithmic-wage-and-labor-exploitation-in-platform-work-in-the-us>

The activity of the state-unions in the gig sector is so low and so reactionary that local governments have actually provided more concessions to gig workers *without* state-union involvement. As mentioned above, Massachusetts forced a settlement with Uber and Lyft that required a \$32.50/hr nominal minimum wage during “active” time, adjustable to inflation. Furthermore, these companies must now offer benefits like “portable health funds,” “secure occupational accident insurance,” and “up to 40 hours of paid sick leave per year⁵⁸.” This wasn’t even done through legislation. It was done through the courts!

Similarly, “In April 2024, the New York City Mayor and the DCWP Commissioner announced that, effective immediately, the city’s ‘minimum pay rate’ (referring to the hourly app pay) for app-based restaurant delivery workers would be raised to \$19.56 per hour (before tips and before tax or expense deductions) and would be adjusted annually for inflation⁵⁹.” This shows just how scared the ruling class is at the prospect of independent gig-unionism, to the extent they will simply ignore state-union tactics due to their failings and massive bureaucracy.

Unfortunately, all that these concessions do is foster support for the Democratic Party and the State so that gig workers *don’t* become independent or *don’t* organize at all. Without struggle or long-term organization, these concessions can be reversed at any time if the ruling class thought it would be beneficial. And of course, these concessions are simply a replacement for re-classification, meaning they are nothing but scraps to make these workers feel better about their lack of basic employee rights. Where must gig workers go from here? How can we ensure our movement is successful in realizing *above* minimum standards for *all of us*, and not just sub-par standards for ridesharers in a minority of cities? Independent, class-conscious, and class-combative trade-unionism, currently being organized by the New Labor Organizing Committee. Before a Gig Workers Union can be formed, however, we must start at the lowest-level, the “shop-floor,” and expand from there until a majority of gig workers in various locales are organized.

Organizing Gig Workers

First off, before discussing the peculiarities of organizing the gig-sector, it is necessary to touch on why exactly gig workers need a distinct sectoral organization from other service workers, represented in the New Labor movement by the Organization of Class-Conscious Service Workers (OCSW), despite the fact that the vast majority of gig workers, and those who would need different methods of organizing in the first place, are found in the service industry. At this point, the New Labor movement has yet to consolidate any industrial or trade unions, although our shop-committee systems will build the basic framework for this and efforts are being made towards greater industrial-unity through the construction of Industrial Unity Committees. One example of this underdevelopment is shown in the fact that, necessarily, the New Laborists in the logistics industry are organized according to enterprise, UPS, USPS, and Amazon, due to: 1.) the sheer monopolization and scope of these companies⁶⁰, but more importantly, 2.) the pervasiveness of the state-unions in UPS and USPS, less so in Amazon, establishing a level of political distinction⁶¹ between these

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch, *The Gig Trap: Algorithmic, Wage and Labor Exploitation in Platform Work in the US*, pp. 77-78, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/05/12/the-gig-trap/algorithmic-wage-and-labor-exploitation-in-platform-work-in-the-us>

⁵⁹ *IBID.*, p. 77

⁶⁰ USPS having a literal (state) monopoly over postal-delivery, and Amazon and UPS basically splitting parcel-delivery down the middle as a duopoly.

⁶¹ Teamsters being overwhelmingly a UPS union, although seeking to expand its monopoly to Amazon workers as well. The USPS with the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), the National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU), establishing a system of government-controlled craft-unionism, including a police-

enterprises that must first be addressed before combining their respective shop-committees into a singular logistics union.

Because of this peculiarity, having distinct shop-committees by national enterprise is not something universally applicable. This mistake was made with *Barista's Voice* for Starbucks workers, despite the incredibly low-level of state-union activity in the service industry, before its merger with OCSW. As stated in the criticism/self-criticism of *Barista's Voice*:

"Initially *Barista's Voice* and OCSW were kept separate based on the precedent established by the NLOC organizers at USPS, UPS, and Amazon. However, USPS, UPS, and Amazon all have very different organizational situations, while both Starbucks and the rest of the service industry are for the most part totally unorganized. This was a mistake on the NLOC leaderships' part, as they should have applied the example of Strike the Stage (entertainment industry) to the service industry instead of the vastly different (in terms of labor organization) logistics industry. This redundancy placed an unnecessary burden on the Baristas Voice leadership when they should have been assisted by the OCSW."

For the same reason, we would not create distinct shop-papers and shop-committee systems by enterprise for the gig-sector. However, there is something more significant here. There will be distinct local shop-organizations between enterprises, and within enterprises, with the OCSW *because these enterprises are organized into distinct workplaces*. As discussed throughout this article, that is not the case with the gig-sector. All of us lack a definite or consistent workplace, even if some rideshare drivers might spontaneously congregate at certain transit-hubs, which means we have as much professional-unity between enterprises and between sub-sectors that we do *within* enterprises and sub-sectors— none.

As such, organizing the gig-sector at the local-level will require a level of unity between enterprises not attainable for current OCSW shop-committees except on a broader, supra-workplace level. It is precisely for this reason that, at this point, merging the gig-sector and the broader service industry in shop-organizing would be detrimental to the basic framework that we must first construct. The conditions faced by gig-sector workers are totally alien to regular service workers, and even a consolidated industrial union would require distinct shop-papers and trade unions to account for these differences.

As of now, the structure of OCSW and its shop-paper *The Service Worker* relies on the fact that these workers are organized into definite workplaces *within* geographic locales, while any local shop-organization for gig workers has to *start at* the geographic-level. Functionally, OCSW is a *sub-industrial* organization in the professional food service sector. This means that, as New Labor work expands, it might be necessary to construct other distinct sectoral organizations within the service industry like for retail, grocery, taxi, beautician, janitorial, and domestic workers, all of whom have distinct conditions from each other, and, again, despite an occasional similarity in terms of concrete labor with the gig-sector, all of whom have an unparalleled-level of professional unity, with definite and consistent workplaces, compared to gig workers. Logistically, ideologically, politically, and organizationally, it is absolutely necessary to distinguish these sectors at anything lower than industrial-level unity. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to propose a distinct sectoral organization of gig-sector workers with distinct methods of local shop-organizing and a distinct shop-paper/central organ.

We have seen that the “gigification” of labor has affected various branches of industry, mainly service, but also logistics and entertainment. Even within industries there is some variation, with shift-finding apps vs. standard gig-platforms being the biggest example. Therefore, we define the gig-sector not merely based on the “gigification” of labor, but in order to attain an accurate depiction of the distinct social relations that must be organized geographically, we start with the service industry, and from there, and only there, we reach those gig workers who truly have no definite or consistent workplace, employed by enterprises that have no physical means of production. This obviously excludes actual freelancers or small-businesses, but also excludes logistics workers and those who use shift-finding apps, both of whom have or can find a definite workplace. That being said, it will most likely be necessary to form some type of App-Based Worker Committee as a cross-body organization capable of combining our struggles for re-classification, which affects all gig workers and not just gig-sector workers.

The gig-sector proper includes the vast majority of gig workers generally, those working for service-based apps like Uber, Lyft, DoorDash, TaskRabbit, and InstaCart, largely involving delivery, taxi, and domestic work. The actual labor divisions here are, however, arbitrary for a shop-organization, although the different enterprises that organize them may have different immediate demands attached. The significance of the gig-sector comes from the fact that digital technology and capital accumulation has reached a point where a sub-section of stagnant wage-laborers, expanding and contracting according to different tendencies between and within the active and reserve armies of labor, are involved in such menial labor that 1.) standard means of consumption for most workers can be employed as means of production, 2.) because of this technology and labor, workers can be fully isolated from a definite or consistent workplace and from other co-workers, and 3.) their pay, productivity, and labor-routes can all be managed with automated algorithms relying only on the human-input of the productive worker. The benefits of this for capital, and the detriments for the worker, have been discussed in detail above, but to summarize, this allows capital to misclassify workers and exclude them from historical concessions and labor-protections like minimum-wage, centralize investments solely in digital technology and technicians, rely on tipping to remunerate costs of production, and gain absolute control over the internal competition of workers in order to deflate wages to an absolute minimum. It is the peculiar conditions of this sector that provides us with the social basis for a labor organization, as well as the main challenges that must be overcome in the process.

Starting at the basic level of trade union organization, the shop-floor, or literal local-level in this case, we can largely categorize these obstacles along four major lines: the social, the logistical, the technical, and the political. The technical challenge is largely just the role our means of production and physical labor-routine play in isolating us from each other, as well as the role algorithms play in obscuring our pay-rates. The political barrier really just comes from our legal misclassification, as well as any petty-bourgeois ideas that are trafficked in with it. The social and logistical converge when it comes to the effect of our professional isolation and geographic scattering on the basic administrative work, as well as the investigative work, of trade-unionism: taking a comprehensive roll of workers, arranging meetings and meeting sites, surveying grievances and demands, investigating attitudes, planning labor action, recruiting new members, collecting dues, and distributing trade union literature like a shop-paper. A lot of this may be overcome in very specific instances where several gig workers spontaneously converge in one place, like with ridesharers at an airport. Here, one can take advantage of close proximity to investigate, recruit, and distribute materials, and this highly concentrated commercial centre provides an easy target for labor action, the main thing being that gig workers actually take advantage of their vehicles to block scabs and traffic.

This, however, only encompasses one portion of the gig-sector, ridesharers, and only when the infrastructure and consumer demand exists for such a congregation. Because state-union tactics can largely be reduced to propaganda, doing the bare minimum needed to convince workers to pay dues, it makes sense why state-unionist and centrist gig-organizations are limited to rideshare drivers in large cities where they can easily rally an already congregated mass of workers. This is, however, an exception, not a rule, to organizing the gig-sector. The majority of gig workers, in the majority of cities and towns, will never spontaneously congregate in one central location. Delivery drivers are only ever going to and from various restaurants or stores. Domestic laborers are individually found in residential areas. Many ridesharers don't have the ability to wait in a singular location for rides and are, like delivery drivers, constantly driving to and from locations. This greatly limits what activity can actually be done while workers are on-the-job. Delivery drivers are the only part of the gig-sector who consistently interact with other workplaces, and through that, are much more likely to encounter other delivery drivers on their route. They can take advantage of this to post flyers, converse, and distribute materials. Outside of this and rideshare congregations, though, that is pretty much the extent of what organizers can do on the job.

Through broader organizations like the New Labor Committees, it is possible to mobilize food and grocery worker contacts to distribute propaganda on behalf of gig-organizers, seeing as they are actually more likely to encounter gig workers than gig workers themselves, and any contacts who regularly use our services should be taken advantage of to distribute propaganda as well. However, the key insight that a gig-organizer could use to have a deeper conversation with gig workers will be lost here. It is clear, then, that the bulk of gig-organizing will have to occur outside of the "natural" context gig-work puts us in. Propaganda can only do so much without the real nuts and bolts of a shop-committee system. Where, then, do we start?

As an individual organizer, one's first goal should be to find someone to assist in the formation of a local shop-paper committee, someone who is receptive to NLOC's line, which they should always be educated on. A shop-paper committee should be utilized to start/join and propagate a shop-paper, but a large part of gaining consistent contacts, readership, and information involves conversations about co-workers' grievances, demands, and attitudes. Because of our isolation and job-sequence, if one is even capable of interacting with other gig workers on the job, it will only be in short bursts, and it's very unlikely one will see that person again.

Therefore, along with the shop-paper, a gig worker shop-organization should create an online forum that can also be propagated and that any gig worker can freely join. This will give gig workers the space to express their grievances on or off the job, facilitate surveys that can gain vital information about objective and subjective conditions (specifically statistics on wages and costs of production), and allow rapid communication between organizers and contacts. The forum should be viewed as the second arm of the shop-paper. It should be used to publish writings and then initiate discussions about them, but also serving as a basis for investigation and reports in the first place. But ultimately, the forum is only a means to an end. In the process of compiling grievances, contacts, and other information through the forum, one should always be seeking to plan meetings, whether 1-on-1 or group meetings, in order to foster physical congregation among workers that can be used to initiate and work on campaigns, as well as recruit members to local shop-committees. If one is starting off locally as a lonesome gig worker, but might know other workers in general, they should attempt to establish a New Labor Committee that can assist with initiating a shop-paper committee. Otherwise, propaganda can be produced individually to raise interest and make contacts.

Outside of spontaneous on-the-job interactions with other gig workers, which is pretty much impossible for domestic laborers and scattered ridesharers, gaining contacts and propagating

information about your shop-paper/forum will have to be a lot more passive⁶². This makes the tactic of posting/pasting propaganda in commercial areas that much more important. Organizers will have to make use of off-the-job agit-prop outings, along with on-the-job agit-prop if possible, for effective outreach. Collecting information about significant commercial centers, especially for gig workers, will be vital to establishing a routine, which is another reason to establish or join a nearby New Labor Committee that should be collecting similar information for their own geographic-based agit-prop.

When multiple organizers are found nationally, it becomes possible to create a central body like OCSW or *Strike the Stage's* Organizing Committee to take on editorial responsibilities for a shop-paper, plan the formation and expansion of local shop-committees, and provide organizers capable of establishing industrial and sectoral unity with other NLOC shop-organizations and independent labor organizations like RDU and TDU. This goal needs to be embedded in one's short-term strategy, and the production of a national shop-paper can be utilized to initiate local shop-committees and campaigns. A central body will also be capable of establishing a List of Demands in line with the NLOC Program based on the information gathered from local organizing. This will provide an ideological basis for both local campaigns and the national campaign towards the formation of a Gig Workers Trade Union, as well as a Service Workers Industrial Union, and a bargaining unit capable of establishing contracts.

Another important aspect of local and national shop-paper committees is the delegation of shop-representatives to different areas or departments of work, for both production and social differences. For a gig worker organization, this would look like having representatives for delivery (which might be divided into food and grocery/retail), ridesharing, and domestic work, as well as representatives for different social sectors like women, LGBTQ+, and nationally-oppressed workers. It will also be necessary to establish divisions of labor like a secretary, editor, propaganda officer, and forum administrator once an organization has expanded enough. Organizers should utilize these different areas of economic, social, and political work to establish specialized departments or committees that both contacts and organizers can join to educate, agitate, and mobilize around specific issues and campaigns. For example, a forum administrator could go on to form a proper grievance committee to host meetings and practice rank-and-file democracy with contacts who may not be ready to join the shop-organization. A women's representative may head a department that can investigate women-specific issues like harassment on the job, the effect of gig work on domestic reproductive labor, and the need for benefits like maternity and menstrual leave, covered health insurance for reproductive and gender-affirming care, and universal child-care.

Overall, local shop-committees need to approach their work from the perspective of laying the basis for a future union. They should utilize struggles for immediate demands like the reclassification of gig workers on a state-level or city-wide standards for gig wages and benefits as stepping-stones towards the establishment of official union standards and contracts.

Tactics and strategy for winning these demands will have to be oriented around the most effective means of withholding our labor. Due to the ease of hiring and firing gig workers, riskier tactics like

⁶² That is, unless it becomes possible to organize some type of make-shift "break-room" in a public or private space. Gig-unionism in general, due to the fact that we nominally own our means of production, seems like it will require some level of consumer cooperation combined with trade-unionism as a long-term strategy. This could look like anything from the Gig Union choosing which corporation to sell its labor-power to, bargaining with corporations to get the best deals on cars, and, as mentioned, buying, renting, or demanding spaces for gig workers to congregate on break or for meetings. This article does not really delve into the specifics of these tactics simply due to a lack of direct or indirect experience. Gig workers must first construct the basis for trade-unionism and begin realising demands before we can really know what t. That is why we see implementation of consumer co-op as a longer-term strategy.

walkouts and strikes should only be used when they can incur significant damage to local profits and commerce like through a general strike. For purely local demands like greater spaces for gig workers to park, especially in downtown areas or transit-hubs, less risky tactics like sector-specific strikes, demand letters, or negotiations may be used against local governments. TDU, for example, has been able to reap concessions from the Nashville City Government like the creation of rideshare zones through rideshare-specific strikes targeting the airport⁶³. However, some of their more recent actions like a “protest caravan” resulted in the banning of those drivers from the airport by the companies themselves⁶⁴, showing that more leverage would’ve been necessary to gain amnesty from labor action, however temporary. For organizers in smaller cities and counties, it may be necessary to establish multi-city and/or multi-county organizations to establish this kind of leverage. Overall, it will require a lot of investigation to plan out effective local strategies and a lot of expansion to mobilize for demands.

To summarize, the geographic-based construction of gig worker organizations will require unique tactics like off-the-job agit-prop in commercial centers, quick on-the-clock distribution of shop-papers and other propaganda, social media forums, public meetings, sectoral departments (delivery, rideshare, domestic), and general strikes to win our similarly unique demands of reclassification, open algorithms, elimination of arbitrary incentives and rewards tiers, and employer-covered costs of production. Our extremely precarious and unique sectoral position provides us with as many opportunities as it does challenges. We must make use of our massive geographic and commercial presence to turn our potential into reality, but this will require protracted work on the part of organizers to establish the broadest possible connections with gig-sector workers from all the different enterprises and divisions of labor. The Johnson City New Labor Committee calls on all gig workers in the U.S. to assist us in building a class-conscious gig workers movement, taking a lesson from our Brazilian comrades, and we look forward to uniting with all who do!

⁶³ A Luta Sique, “TDU’s Wins at the City Level,” <https://www.alutasigue.org/tdu>

⁶⁴ Tamar Sarai, PRISM, “Dozens of Uber and Lyft drivers banned from Nashville airport after protest caravan,” <https://prismreports.org/2025/04/16/rideshare-drivers-nashville-airport-ban/>