

Frågor att fundera över

- 1. Vad skiljer gigekonomin från tidigare arbetsformer?*
- 2. Varför växer den?*
- 3. Vad kan det här få för konsekvenser för oss som arbetar? Vad kan vi se för konsekvenser redan idag?*
- 4. Hur förändrar det spelplanen för organisering?*

Vilda strejker lönar sig – de spanska taxiförarna vann mot Uber

Plattformsekonomin är en typ av kapitalism där kapitalisten inte äger produktionsmedlen - dem får arbetaren bekosta själv.

De vita taxibilarna bildar en kilometerlång linje som sträcker sig från tågstationen till Consejería de Fomento. Alla är tomma men ingen är ledig. Överallt gubbar som skrattar, målar banderoller, spelar fotboll mellan bilarna, sitter på utfällbara stolar och diskuterar. Strejken har nått Sevilla.

Den började i Barcelona och spred sig och nu strejkar taxiförare över hela Spanien. Och det finns inget som kan visa arbetares makt som en strejk: med ens uppdragas en yrkesgrupps nyckelroll i samhället. Bilarna blockerar allén som leder in till Málaga, de blockerar Madrids flygplats och i Zaragoza får bara den som ska till sjukhus åka taxi men då bjuder de på resan.

Anledningen är som på så många andra platser i världen det multinationella företaget Uber. Värderat till 70 miljarder dollar och backat av investerare som Goldman Sachs och Blackrock har Uber trots förluster kunnat ta sig in på taximarknaden världen över och i vissa städer, som San Francisco i USA, till och med helt slå ut traditionell taxi. "Delningsekonomi" kallades det initialt, men det finns ingen som delar med sig något här, särskilt inte Ubers ägare. Det här är snarare taxibranschens Ryan Air och receptet stavas lönedumpning.

Den som vill börja köra för Uber måste använda sin egen bil och får således bekosta all bensin och allt underhåll själv. Det finns ingen anställning och således ingen pension, semesterersättning eller garantilön utan föraren får bara pengar vid en körning, och då är det tävlingen om vem som kan erbjuda lägst pris. Uber tar minst 25 procent av resans pris, plus en mängd dolda kostnader som "bokningsavgift" och "serviceavgift" så att föraren i slutändan tjänar mellan 50 och 100 kronor i timmen - i Sverige.

Det är en typ av kapitalism där kapitalisten inte äger produktionsmedlen - dem får arbetaren

bekosta själv - utan endast har skapat appen som är nödvändig för att kunna sätta produktionsmedlen i bruk. Samuel Engblom från TCO har kallat det "plattformsekonomi" - kapitalisten äger plattformen och för att få använda sig av den måste du ge delar av din lön till honom, trots att det bara är du som arbetar och han kanske sitter i en annan stad.

Arbetar du åt Foodora måste du ha egen cykel och kör du sopor åt Tiptapp måste du ha egen bil. För oss som frilansjournalister är detta inget nytt, tvärtom: mediebranschen blev en plattformsekonomi redan på 90-talet. Dator, kontorslokal, telefon och resor får vi betala själva och trots att det är vi som fyller tidningarna med material får vi en bråkdel av profiten, eftersom vi inte äger själva plattformen. Även om det bara är en sajt på nätet. Och den dag vi inte efterfrågas har vi inget jobb.

Under mina femton år som skribent för DN, Metro, Expressen och denna tidning har jag aldrig sett ett kontrakt. Nästa artikel kan alltid bli den sista. Och arvoden har inte höjts på dessa år - i rena pengar får man fortfarande ut några tusenlappar för en artikel som kan ta flera veckor att skriva.

Nackdelarna med plattformsekonomi för arbetarna är uppenbara. Inte bara sänks lönerna och tryggheten försvinner - man måste också ha ett visst startkapital för att ens kunna jobba. Utan en bil eller cykel eller kontor blir det svårt att ens sätta igång.

Den dag hela ekonomin går över till plattformsekonomi måste arbetaren först belåna sig för att köpa produktionsmedel och då har vi återgått till skuldslaveriet som i de mexikanska caobadjunglerna B. Traven skildrade på tjugotalet: ge den fattige ett lån och sedan får han arbeta hela livet för att betala tillbaka det.

Skälet till att plattformsekonomi är så populär bland kunder är dock inte bara att det är billigt - det är att apparna är smarta och bra att använda. Men att kunna få ett fast pris, att kunna se var bilen befinner sig, att pengarnas dras från kontot automatiskt behöver ju inte innebära utnyttjande. Det är inte appen som är problemet - det är att den ägs av en kapitalist som använder den för att själv ta profiten. Säg att appen ägdes av taxiförarna själva eller av staten. Lika bekvämt för kunder och samtidigt bättre för förarna.

Uber har fått lämna Danmark, Italien och Bulgarien, Uberpop fälldes i domstol i Sverige och i Indien strejkade 50 000 Uberförare förra året för att kräva vanliga anställningsavtal. Och i helgen kom beskedet: de spanska taxiförarna har vunnit. Efter bara tre dagar vek sig regeringen och gick med på kraven, som inte är att förbjuda Uber utan att införa en reglering för antalet licenser. Det kan nyliberalerna tycka vad de vill om. Men när taxiförarna går ihop finns det inget de kan göra åt saken.

Kajsa Ekis Ekman

På besök i gig-ekonomins djungel

Ibrahim Alkhaffaji

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Privat arbetsförmedling via appar har exploderat. Men när Arbetets reporter gav sig ut på jakt efter ett jobb behövdes det 43 ansökningar innan det blev napp. Och då var det en kollega som fejkade ett barnvaksbehov. Välkommen in i jobbdjungeln.

ARBETET TESTAR APPJOB. Tiptapp, UberEats, Deliveroo, Foodora och Care.

Antalet appar som förmedlar tjänster till privatpersoner växer kraftigt. Det är det som brukar kallas för gig-jobb; korta, tillfälliga jobb som kan handla om vad som helst.

De flesta av de digitala tjänsterna luckrar upp den svenska arbets-marknadens innersta kärna, begreppen arbetsgivare och arbetstagare.

Det blev uppenbart när Arbetet började söka jobb via den digitala plattformen care.com.

Mammor, pappor, söner, döttrar och djurägare. Så presenterar sig gruppen bakom care.com på sin hemsida.

”Vi vet att det kan vara svårt att hitta rätt tjänsteleverantör till dina älsklingar och ditt hem. Därför är vi extra måna om att hjälpa tjänstesökanden hitta barnvakter, barnflickor, äldrevård, djurpassning, hundrastare och städhjälp som möter just deras behov” skriver man på sajten.

Bakom formuleringarna döljer sig ett amerikanskt företag startat 2006. Grundaren är en amerikanska med filippinska rötter: Sheila Marcelo, med examen från elituniversitetet Harvard i bagaget.

Den del av företaget som är verksam i Europa – och Sverige – är registrerad i Berlin. Bolaget är enligt egna uppgifter världens största digitala företag för förmedling av hembaserade tjänster som städning, äldrevård, barn- eller hundvakt, läxhjälp, trädgårdsarbete och assistans till funktionsnedsatta.

Det kan handla om att hämta barn från förskolan ena dagen hos X, för att sedan ta hand om någons sjuka gamla mamma hemma hos Y andra dagen.

Care.com fungerar med andra ord som en marknad där tjänster, huvudsakligen, köps av privatpersoner.

Arbetet bestämde sig för att testa.

Reportern Ibrahim Alkhaffaji anmälde sig som arbetssökande, en "tjänsteleverantör". För 199 kronor fick han registrera sig på sajten. Det var en engångskostnad.

Trodde vi. Men efter 25 sökta jobb var hans så kallade polletter slut.

Tre veckor senare betalade Arbetet därför in ytterligare 160 kronor och Ibrahim kunde fortsätta att söka jobb. Han sålde in sig som barnvakt med formuleringen: "Mycket stark och trevlig, samt omtänksam person." För att få jobb hemma hos äldre löd marknadsföringen: "Omtänksam, tålmodig, trevlig och väldigt stark."

Kvalifikationer: Flerspråkig, körkort B, erfarenhet av att ta hand om små barn, jobb inom Kriminalvården, parkvärd på Gröna Lund och telefonförsäljning.

Han nämnde aldrig högskolepoängen i statsvetenskap och idéhistoria men kryssade däremot i rutan "kan tänka sig att bo i familjen".

Det de äldre skulle kunna få hjälp med var: kroppsvård, bad och dusch, transporter, sällskap och ärenden och inköp.

Han skapade fem olika jobbprofiler inom områdena städning, äldrevård, läxhjälp, barnpassning, trädgård och personlig assistans.

De två sista profilerna accepterades inte av sajten. Sannolikt ansågs inte meriterna vara tillräckliga.

75 kronor i timmen var han beredd att sälja tjänster för. Men efter 42 jobbansökningar på drygt en månad var det fortfarande noll napp.

Vi beslutade då att skapa en köpare, en "tjänstesökande".

"Jag söker en omtänksam och ansvarsfull barnvakt till två barn. Jag vill helst ha någon med några års erfarenhet och med goda referenser", var beställningen från Arbetets förälder, Sandra Lund. Hon sa sig vara beredd att betala 375 kronor för tre timmars arbete. Arbetet skulle ske hemma på onsdag eftermiddag. Det handlade om att hämta och lämna barnen och att göra "lättare hushållssysslor".

Bingo.

Äntligen ett jobb till Ibrahim – om än fejkat. So far so good. Men här börjar frågorna att uppstå.

- Hur ska betalningen ske?
- Hur och vem skattar? Ska "tjänsteleverantören" lägga på moms?

- Vad händer om någon skadar sig? Om ugnen pajar?

- Kan den som jobbar komma in i det svenska systemet med sjuk- och föräldrapenning, pension och skydd för arbetsmiljön överhuvud-taget?

Vi börjar ringa dem som kan svara. Hos Försäkringskassan blir vi hänvisade till SGI-guiden på hemsidan.

Första frågan där lyder "välj din sysselsättning". Följt av alternativen: anställd, arbetssökande, har aktiebolag, enskild firma, handels- eller kommanditbolag, studerande.

En ruta för "tjänsteleverantör" finns ej. När Arbetet ringer tillbaka konstateras att sjukförsäkringen är gammal och uppbyggd för nio till fem-jobb. Men så länge man skattar ska det gå ändå.

På Skatteverket konstaterar man att det "svenska skattesystemet inte är byggt för att privatpersoner ska sälja till andra privatpersoner". Men det ska gå att göra rätt. Det blir bara väldigt krångligt.

På Pensionsmyndigheten säger man att allt bygger på att man deklarerar sin inkomst och betalar skatt.

Och på Arbetsmiljöverket säger juristen Victoria Hoff att det är en aktuell fråga, men att det tyvärr inte finns något riktigt svar än, vad gäller arbetsmiljön, för den som "tjänstelevererar".

Du kan omfattas av arbetsmiljölagen, men vägen dit är, tja, krånglig. Men det är bra att täcka upp med egna olycksfalls- och drulleförsäkringar.

På Folksam meddelar man att man inte har särskilda försäkringar för dem som jobbar via digitala plattformar, och att det blir en "komplicerad fråga som man behöver titta på från fall till fall".

Care.com då? Ja, när Arbetet vid flera tillfällen kontaktar bolaget, som är registrerat i Berlin, med allehanda frågor, får vi ett och samma svar.

"Allt sådant kommer ni överens om själva. I övrigt gäller svensk lag."

Move Fast and Build Solidarity

Activism at Google and Amazon paid off. But can the emerging “tech left” forge long-term alliances between janitors, drivers, and engineers?

By Avi Asher-Schapiro MARCH 6, 2019

On a Thursday night late last year, a dozen or so people gathered in the women’s Building, a community center in San Francisco’s Mission District, to attend an employment-law seminar hosted by the Tech Workers Coalition (TWC). The group, founded five years ago, helps organize workers and trains them to ask for better conditions, treatment, and pay across the booming technology industry. This particular gathering drew an Uber driver, a contractor with Apple, a former Google employee, and two people from Square, the mobile-payments system. Beth Ross, one of the Bay Area’s fiercest pro-labor attorneys, and Veena Dubal, a labor-law scholar at UC Hastings, held court before the small crowd. “There’s a lot of solidarity to be built here,” said Dubal, who was dressed in business-casual. “A worker is a worker.”

Their talk was about how corporations routinely misclassify workers as “independent contractors,” denying them regular employment benefits and making it harder to organize—a practice that, per Ross, “undermines workers’ solidarity across industries.” Ross, who’s in her 50s, is best known for winning a multimillion-dollar settlement from a San Francisco strip club after it reclassified its dancers as free agents in 1994 and began charging them a nightly \$125 stage fee. In a more recent case, the California Supreme Court narrowed the definition of what constitutes an “independent contractor,” which, Ross said, could present opportunities for contract tech workers to win a broader set of employment and workplace protections.

An intense speaker with brown hair and dark-rimmed glasses, Ross has the confident bearing of a champion litigator. Bosses in every industry, she said, try to cut costs by misclassifying their employees; the only difference between strippers and tech workers is “what they wear—or don’t wear—on the job.”

The assembled workers peppered the lawyers with legal questions and then broke into smaller groups to discuss their motivations and swap tales of abuse. The Uber driver wanted help organizing his fellows in an industry that he said seems designed to block collective action. “I never meet any other drivers,” he said. “I’m just on this app, dealing with these poverty wages alone.”

A coder who had just finished “boot camp”—where, in exchange for learning how to program, participants fork over a percentage of their earnings—wanted to know how to get out of the arrangement. “That sounds like indentured servitude,” someone muttered.

The TWC meeting, while small, demonstrated some of the biggest difficulties of organizing workers in the digital economy. Work-related grievances are linked yet frustratingly atomized; disparities in pay within a company can be as extreme as the ones in the world they inhabit. And as ordinary people around the world grow disillusioned with the power of Big Tech, the workers who keep the floors clean, the cafeteria stocked, and the servers running at these companies are struggling to find a common grammar to make sense of what they owe not just to their communities, but also to each other.

A major challenge for the emerging tech-labor movement today happens to be its biggest advantage as well: The definition of a “tech worker” is broad, almost to the point of being meaningless. Working “in tech” could conceivably mean doing anything on the Internet, or with computers or smartphones or anything that plugs into a wall. This, in turn, means there are far more potential recruits for the labor movement. But while software engineers and Uber drivers may get their paychecks from the same pot of corporate money, their experiences, problems, and approaches to solving them aren’t necessarily aligned.

This is especially important today, because somewhere between the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Google’s secret plan to build a censored search engine for the authoritarian Chinese government, and Amazon’s recent ouster from the New York City borough of Queens, Silicon Valley has lost its air of invincibility, opening up new possibilities for organizing in the workplace.

To take some recent examples: In late 2018, Somali workers at an Amazon warehouse in Minneapolis forced the company to the negotiating table. The staff at Palantir demanded that their CEO stop working with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency. Microsoft employees presented their bosses with a petition, signed by 300,000 people, to protest the company’s work facilitating immigrant detention. And the year was capped off by a massive international walkout at Google, accompanied by an aggressive list of demands that ranged from placing a workers’ representative on the board to overhauling sexual-harassment protocols. *Wired* called it “The Year Tech Workers Realized They Were Workers.”

TWC, an all-volunteer organization that lacks the structure or leadership hierarchies of a traditional labor union, is trying to ride this wave of dissent. With chapters in Seattle, New York, and Boston, its members help coordinate labor actions across companies and mobilize cadres of workers on the inside. In the Bay Area, TWC held five separate events, including an introduction to the organization, a primer on labor law, and a forum to share workplace experiences—all in the first month of 2019. TWC welcomes employees of all kinds, from coders to janitors: As Moira Weigel recounted in *The Guardian*, the organization was formed in 2014 out of a friendship between a computer engineer and a cafeteria worker who set out to forge an alternative to the “Californian Ideology,” or the industry’s long-standing ethos of individualism and self-reliance. Over coffee in San Francisco, a TWC volunteer who’s worked as a product manager in Silicon Valley said the workforce he was part of is undergoing a fundamental shift away from an aspirational admiration for bosses and toward a deeper solidarity among colleagues. The volunteer—who requested anonymity in order to avoid retaliation from the companies he organizes in—believes that well-paid engineers will band together with lower-paid workers when they see the writing on the wall, noting: “They

need to be convinced that the way contract workers are treated now, that's how engineers will be treated in the future.”

This philosophy—that coders, drivers, and janitors can be corralled into collective action—is hard to square with the stereotypes of libertarian Googlers cavorting at Burning Man. It's also hard to put into action for the most committed activists accustomed to more contained initiatives.

Thom Hoffman, a longtime driver for Uber and Lyft, has become one of the Bay Area's most prominent rideshare organizers. “Collective action, unions, building workers' power—these are the things that prevent individuals from being taken advantage of,” he told me recently by phone.

Hoffman, who's in his 50s, has broad shoulders and speaks with a Midwestern lilt that inflects his acquired California slang. He's the kind of rideshare driver that companies like Uber and Lyft would hold up as a testament to their own virtue: that they're simply in the business of helping people make extra cash.

Hoffman says he took up driving to supplement an unsteady job working for a costume-and-prop company. It helped that he enjoyed the work. “Dude, I loved driving,” he told me. “I was pumping it up to everyone.” That all changed in 2016, when Uber and Lyft started cutting rates in a mad scramble to eat up market share and convince would-be investors to inject cash into their still-unprofitable businesses. (Later in the year, Uber received \$3.5 billion from the Saudi Arabian sovereign-wealth fund.)

Hoffman started organizing because “it felt like 20 to 30 percent of my paycheck was gone overnight.” More than two years before the meeting in the San Francisco women's center, he was on the streets of the East Bay helping the Service Employees International Union, or SEIU, build a list of Uber drivers. He spent most of his time knocking on car windows in the Oakland airport lot where drivers congregated, slowly helping to build up a sense of common purpose.

Hoffman made good money—up to \$4,000 a month before taxes—from a major Silicon Valley company. But he saw himself as a union man, not a tech worker: “Dad was in the carpenters' union, and Mom was a hospital aide who worked on the union drive.” In fact, when he moved to the Bay Area in 2008, he'd hoped to find steady work with the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, the union he'd belonged to back home in Indiana.

Hoffman's theory of change is old-school: If enough Uber drivers decide to band together, the company will have no choice but to take their demands seriously. And he's ambivalent about the white-collar kids identifying with—and trying to organize—the drivers' struggle. “I wish them the best,” he says. Still, he's focusing on mobilizing other drivers.

On the surface, Hoffman doesn't have a lot in common with Meredith Whittaker. An expert on the social impact of artificial intelligence, Whittaker has worked at Google for over a decade, earns orders of magnitude more than the average rideshare driver, and recently co-founded her own research institute at New York University. She also happens to be one of Google's fiercest and most active critics, working tirelessly to build internal resistance at the company.

Last year, Whittaker was one of a number of Google employees to pressure the company to stop working with the Pentagon's military artificial-intelligence program, known as Project Maven. Such protests are becoming more common: In February, Microsoft workers went public to protest a \$480 million contract to provide augmented-reality headsets to the US Army.

"You can't have a company whose ultimate rationale is shareholder value making decisions about how to automate weapons," Whittaker says. That applies more broadly than to Google's drones: A workers' movement inside Big Tech is necessary to inject social responsibility into the industry. At Google, Whittaker explained, the company went through the motions of listening to employees by holding town halls. Company message boards allowed employees to voice dissent internally. But to halt Project Maven, Google employees also had to go public in opposition to their bosses; some even quit in protest. "People conflated having a voice with having power," she noted.

While Hoffman speaks of struggling to make the rent and afford his health insurance, Whittaker speaks of ethics and alliances. But both efforts—Hoffman's organizing of drivers, and Whittaker's solidarity-building inside Google—challenge the radical individualism that's informed so many Silicon Valley companies and organizations. And in the absence of meaningful regulation from Washington, combining these efforts seems to be the only hope of holding the Big Tech companies accountable.

Labor scholars say they sense changes afoot. "It's true that a libertarian ethos has been overwhelming here," said Harley Shaiken, a labor scholar who teaches at UC Berkeley. Shaiken predicts a reckoning between the implicit promise of working in Silicon Valley—helping to make the world a better (or at least more efficient) place—and its reality: building censored search engines for autocracies, enriching sexual harassers, and providing logistical support for family separation. "Many went into this field with a vision of the world, and that didn't involve helping the Pentagon build drones," he added.

"These companies made their names trying to change the world, but we examine the change and we think, 'We don't like it,'" Whittaker said shortly after helping organize a massive walkout at Google in late 2018. The precipitating event was a New York Times story about Andy Rubin, a Google executive whom the company paid \$90 million to depart after he was accused of sexual harassment. "We are not going to play whack-a-mole with every new outrage," Whittaker said. "What we are going to do is to change the system."

The walkout proved to be an impressive show of force: From Singapore to Dublin, thousands participated, with more than 3,000 workers in New York alone. Management quickly

conceded to one of the movement's demands: to stop using binding-arbitration agreements in sexual-harassment cases. As Walker noted, "Collective action actually works to get change when official channels don't."

"The tech workers' movement is here to stay," says Will Luckman, an organizer with the Democratic Socialists of America's Tech Action working group. "The question now is: What are we going to do with it?"

I met Luckman in a Brooklyn cafe a few days after Amazon announced plans for a new headquarters in Long Island City, Queens. Before long, Tech Action had convened a meeting of more than 40 activists and employees—many from major tech companies—at a community center in Manhattan. "Raise your hand if you hate Amazon," one of the organizers said. When it was Luckman's turn to speak, he posed a number of reasons that New Yorkers should be vigilant about an expanded Amazon presence. He also summarized just how central technology companies have become to perpetuating social and economic inequality, either through worker exploitation, gentrification, regulatory capture, or the development of invasive technologies and surveillance that tend, disproportionately, to hurt people of color.

That's a lot to digest at once. And for workers organizing against Big Tech—not to mention casual observers and ordinary people who resent Facebook and Amazon—it can be difficult to grasp where the problem begins or ends. If Silicon Valley is responsible for high rents, loss of privacy, institutional racism, and low wages, how can ordinary people confront it?

Luckman and his colleagues suggested several ways forward, including canvassing neighborhoods and circulating a petition opposing Amazon's anti-union stance. An explosion of activism and protests, from town halls to City Council meetings, followed—all organized by community groups in Queens.

What these groups didn't expect was to see such quick results: Amazon abruptly cancelled its expansion, citing an insufficiently "positive" attitude from "a number of state and local politicians."

Amazon represented a threat to so many people that it made itself a galvanizing target, explained Sasha Wijeyeratne, the executive director of CAAV Organizing Asian Communities: "The scope of this fight was unprecedented, and winning gives us so much hope." The campaign thus showcased the potential for intersectional organizing against Big Tech: Amazon's work with ICE enraged immigrant communities, its opposition to unions fired up labor organizers, and the gentrification it would provoke mobilized seniors and low-income residents in Queens.

It's still unclear exactly why Amazon pulled out, but The New York Times reported that executives were concerned that the new headquarters was inviting too much scrutiny of its business practices. "We are changing the relationships between local officials, their communities, and tech giants," Luckman told me by phone after Amazon announced its withdrawal. The alliances and momentum they built could be taken further; he was

particularly excited about an ongoing union drive at an Amazon warehouse in Staten Island. Some workers from that warehouse were active in Queens, too. “The lesson learned here is that collective action does work against these major tech companies,” Luckman said. “A well-organized group of community members can fight back—and win.”

That victory resonates outside of New York as well. “People are waking up to the impact tech has on our neighborhoods, cities, and democracy,” said Maria Noel Fernandez, the director of Silicon Valley Rising, which has been organizing against a proposed Google expansion in San Jose. “The current system of tech corporations subverting local democracy can’t continue.”

The solidarity driving the new tech workers’ movement can obscure some uncomfortable tensions. Engineers making six figures don’t just see the world differently from their service-worker counterparts: They’re treated differently, too.

Hoffman, the Uber driver, learned this firsthand back in October. Weeks before the global Google walkout, Hoffman and a group of drivers decided to ramp things up a notch with Uber. Not only were they making a fraction of the money they’d come to expect, but the company’s opaque deactivation policies were causing some drivers to lose their jobs with no redress once their ratings on the system dipped. Hoffman said that drivers who didn’t speak perfect English felt especially vulnerable; riders would give them low ratings, misinterpreting the driver’s weak language skills for rudeness.

At the same time, the drivers were building a movement. When Hoffman first started organizing, the meetings would sometimes attract fewer than a dozen people. But recently, the Uber drivers began holding digital meetings that people could dial into from the road—and by late 2018, Hoffman told me, the meetings were drawing dozens of new participants each week.

By October, the organizers planned to go to Uber’s headquarters to discuss drivers losing their jobs (the company can “deactivate” a driver at will). Hoffman never made it through the door: he got tackled by a security guard and slammed to the ground as he tried to walk into the building. He was holding a petition with some 5,000 signatures asking the company to meet with drivers to hear their complaints.

“I went into flight-or-fight mode,” Hoffman recalled. Pinned down under the weight of the security guard, with his shoulders and back ground into the pavement, Hoffman felt “a lot of adrenaline, so I didn’t realize until later how much it hurt.” Months later, he was still working with a physical therapist. (Uber has tried to distance itself from the security guard, emphasizing that he was an independent contractor himself.)

For veteran organizers, the contrast between how Google handled its walkout and how Uber dealt with the petition wasn’t surprising. “When management see coders, they’re more likely to think, ‘These are ‘our people,’” explained Jeff Ordower, an organizer for gig workers’ rights at Silicon Valley Rising, who was there when Hoffman got tackled. “When they see drivers, they think, ‘Wow—that’s scary!’” This is precisely why there’s such an effort in the tech

workers' movement to link their fates—or at least build solidarity. It was also the dominant theme at the San Francisco TWC meeting, where the Uber driver sat beside the former Google worker to learn about California employment law. This kind of solidarity has already been tested, with promising results: The battle over Amazon, for example, quickly united lefty white-collar activists with union organizers in New York. But it remains to be seen if it can be sustained and nurtured over the long term, especially in the far less sexy realm of community meetings and contract negotiations.

“In our perfect world, we’d have Uber drivers working with Uber engineers, fighting together,” an organizer at the meeting remarked. (There were no Uber engineers in attendance.) One optimistic TWC volunteer ticked off a series of recent collaborations between higher-paid and lower-paid workers: The group flew out organizers to help a Unite Here union drive for Facebook cafeteria workers in Seattle, and they supported a SEIU campaign to unionize security guards at Amazon.

At Google, Whittaker and her fellow organizers have made the treatment of lower-paid Google contractors a central part of their campaign. In a December 5 statement following the walkout, organizers demanded that Google stop treating those workers—who tend to be from marginalized groups and make up nearly half of Google’s workforce—differently than full-time staff. Pointing out Google’s \$9.2 billion quarterly profit, Whittaker and the other organizers asked that the company put that money to good use, by ending the “pay and opportunity inequity” between contractors and full-time staff.

Google has yet to make any significant concessions on the contractor front. And Whittaker is the first to admit that she and her colleagues are still working out a successful organizing model for the industry. “In some sense, we’re in uncharted territory,” she says. “What we are seeing are changes around the margins—and it’s not surprising the lowest-hanging demands have been the focus of leadership so far.”

It’s seductive to see tech-worker organizing as a panacea for all that ails Big Tech, from labor abuses to privacy violations. But worker power doesn’t necessarily translate into progressive outcomes.

Indeed, as David A. Banks pointed out in an article for *The Baffler* last year, the unionized workers at Boeing and Lockheed Martin aren’t exactly DSA recruits in waiting; they’re part of a union that forms a reliable node in the national-security state. What’s more, in the current tight labor market, tech workers may feel emboldened to make demands on their employers, but that momentum could easily wane when the economy cools off and workers become more anxious about losing their jobs.

Shaikan, the UC Berkeley scholar, cautions that cosmetic fixes could take the place of structural solutions. These aren’t necessarily unwelcome: In the past year, Amazon announced a \$15 hourly wage for its warehouse workers; Google agreed to change its arbitration agreements; and a group of Facebook contractors—backed by their full-time colleagues—successfully resisted a move to fire them if they didn’t consent to a contract with less vacation time and fewer benefits than full-time employees get.

But just as Starbucks assuages public misgivings about inequities in the international-commodities market by offering a branded version of fair-trade coffee, the tech giants will try to neutralize public opposition with partial gestures toward social justice—for example, more robust diversity programs for high-paid workers. “You always have to be on the lookout for co-option,” Shaikan said.

The activists in the trenches aren’t dwelling on hypotheticals just yet. “We have a strong hand, and the drivers are behind us,” Hoffman said, noting that although they haven’t successfully squeezed any concessions out of Uber, more and more drivers are dialing into the weekly organizing meetings. “There’s a rumbling of defection” against management in Big Tech, Whittaker told me. “They’re being pushed by a growing group of concerted workers—when it’s more costly to stay where they are, they will move in our direction.”

Back in the Women’s Building in San Francisco, momentum was building as well: The Square employees realized that Uber’s corporate headquarters is located in their office building. “Let’s stay in touch,” one of the Square workers remarked to the Uber driver as they walked out. “Let us know if you need anything.”

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