

Labour Justice in the Platform Economy

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ABSTRACT *Recent years have witnessed the rise of digital platforms that allow economic agents to arrange ever more fine-grained contracts. This article zooms in on labour-based platforms that permit the hire of labour in a just-in-time fashion (and are part of the broader trend towards on-demand work). Its principal contribution comes in three parts. First, exposing the frequently overlooked diversity of labour-based platforms, the article proposes to distinguish platform companies, which directly sell services and then purchase the labour needed to provide them, and broker platforms, which act merely as intermediaries. Second, it examines how platforms of each type pose distinct threats to labour justice, thereby extending Daniel Halliday's (2021) analysis. Drawing on empirical studies of the experiences of platform workers, it identifies a power imbalance as the root cause of these threats across all platforms. Finally, the article assesses three strategies to counter these threats: introducing stricter regulation, turning platforms into worker-run co-ops, and improving outside job opportunities. In exploring how each strategy could be implemented for specific platforms, it makes the case for always discussing labour-based platforms with one eye to their specific structural features and the other eye to the broader labour market.*

1. Introduction

One of the major economic shifts over the past two decades has been the evolution and increasing reach of digital platforms, which has prompted some to proclaim the 'rise of the platform economy'.¹ Platforms have grown in relevance not only in the economic realm, but also in the social realm, where firms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have grown to connect hundreds of millions of people. Platforms can be characterised as technological frameworks that allow agents to interact – for the purpose of communicating in the case of social platforms and for the purpose of entering fine-grained contracts in the case of economic platforms. By providing a suitable, digitally organised infrastructure, these latter platforms enable economic agents – including customers, workers, and firms – to advertise and search for products and services in ways that would hitherto not have been feasible.

While the platform economy is often treated as a uniform phenomenon, it is important to be attentive to the diversity of platforms. We can distinguish at least three types of economic platforms. First, there are *trade-based platforms* like Ebay, Etsy, and Amazon, which allow individuals and firms to buy and sell a large variety of physical goods.² These platforms effectively operate as digital marketplaces: they enable their users to advertise and to search for specific products, thereby facilitating trade. Second, there are *capital-based platforms* like Airbnb and Tulo, which allow individuals to lease and to rent out capital

assets like apartments and cars. These capital-based platforms form the core of the so-called ‘sharing economy’, which reflects the idealistic roots of the initial heyday of platforms: the idea that by sharing rather than owning capital assets, we can exploit economic inefficiencies that result from their idleness, thereby reducing our environmental footprint.³ Finally, there are *labour-based platforms*, such as TaskRabbit, Upshift, and Uber, which enable individuals to sell, and other agents to buy, labour for specific tasks in a just-in-time manner. Labour-based platforms are symptomatic of the shift towards on-demand work but are not alone in driving it; other policies in the labour market, like employment on zero-hour contracts and the reliance on last-minute scheduling, equally increase the short-term availability of labour. While the distinction between these three categories is not always clear-cut, as some platforms combine several aspects,⁴ it yields a helpful framework for structuring, and narrowing down, the debate of the platform economy. This article focuses on labour-based platforms, i.e. digital matchmakers whose primary aim is to connect those who want to buy labour for a specific task (rather than purchase a physical product or lease a capital asset) with those willing to provide this labour against payment.

This preliminary clarification allows us to turn to the questions that stand at the centre of this article: in what ways do labour-based platforms pose a threat to labour justice, and in what ways can this threat be addressed? Both questions are important and pressing. In recent years, platforms have increasingly been portrayed as drivers of precarity in the media and the popular press;⁵ meanwhile, they are projected to grow substantially more powerful in the near-term future.⁶ While sociologists and ethnographers,⁷ alongside managerial economists,⁸ have devoted significant attention to labour platforms, political philosophers have by-and-large not done so. For example, platforms barely feature in a recent volume, edited by Michael Cholbi and Michael Weber, on the future of work and the proposal of a basic income;⁹ instead, the potential for automation, and the projected loss of jobs resulting from it, take centre stage. Meanwhile, Elizabeth Anderson’s influential proposal to conceive of companies as private governments focuses squarely on regular modes of employment:¹⁰ in detailing the ways in which companies exercise far-reaching, and largely unchecked, power over their workforces, Anderson restricts her view to traditional firms. While there are a few notable contributions,¹¹ the philosophical literature on platform-based work remains fairly slim.

In attempting to answer the two questions specified above, the article proceeds in three steps. Section 2 begins by examining the range of labour-based platforms. While platforms have variously been claimed to be mere marketplaces, to be employers in disguise, and to constitute a distinct form of governing mechanism, I argue that neither view is plausible for all platforms. In assessing their variety, I identify two limiting cases, which do not qualify: mere advertisement forums (which do not allow the direct purchase of labour) and platforms-turned-employers (which sell labour-based services provided by a regular workforce). Among the many platforms that fall in between these extremes, I propose to distinguish between platform companies, which sell on-demand services and rely on independent contractors to provide them, and broker platforms, which act merely as intermediaries, and matchmakers, between contracting parties. Section 3 shows that remaining alert to this range of platforms is critical, if one hopes to attain a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which they pose a threat to justice. Daniel Halliday has recently identified this threat in the attempt of platforms to simultaneously withhold from their workers the freedoms associated with self-employment and the guarantees associated with

regular employment.¹² But while compelling, his analysis is applicable only to platform companies; in the case of broker platforms, the threat takes different forms. While the section details the distinct ways in which labour-based platforms pose a threat of injustice, it also argues that the root cause is always the same: a power imbalance, resulting in a relative lack of bargaining power among workers. Section 4 then examines three strategies that aim to counter these threats: regulating platforms more tightly, turning them into cooperatives, and improving the outside options of workers. It argues that the potential of each of the first two strategies depends on the type of platform, as do the specific ways in which they can effectively be implemented. The third strategy, which is at the same time more fundamental and more generic, does not need to be tailored towards a specific type of platform – in fact, it could equally be pursued for other parts of the labour market. What the section attempts to reveal, in doing all this, is that a fruitful analysis of labour justice in the platform economy requires attention in two regards. One needs to be attentive to the structural organisation of different platforms, which prompts distinctive threats to justice that suggest particular solutions; but one must also be attentive to the wider labour market in which they are embedded, for it critically affects the specific form these threats take, and the ways in which they are best addressed.

2. The Range of Labour-Based Platforms

Where labour-based platforms have received theoretical attention, a central question has been how to classify them.¹³ Platforms themselves have traditionally claimed to be mere intermediaries, akin to a marketplace. Workers and labour activists by contrast often insist that platforms are employers in disguise. And academics have argued that platforms are unlike markets and unlike traditional firms, instead embodying a ‘distinct type of governance mechanism’.¹⁴ This section argues that while there is some truth to each of these views, none captures the full range of labour-based platforms. Among the many platforms that allow the on-demand purchase of labour from people who are not regular employees, the article distinguishes two types: platform companies, which sell services and purchase the labour required to provide them, and broker platforms, which merely act as intermediaries. As Sections 3 and 4 go on to show, this distinction is vital for a thorough assessment of the threats that platforms pose to labour justice and the strategies available to address them.

Most platforms insist that they merely serve as intermediaries in the mould of market makers: they provide a space for sellers and buyers of labour (or labour-based services) to meet and transact. According to this narrative, those who find work through a platform are no more its employees than the owner of a fruit stand is the employee of a farmer’s market. Instead, those who sell their labour, just like those who buy it, are users of the platform. In this understanding, a platform is nothing more than a marketplace. This description has come under intense scrutiny, and it is indeed implausible for platforms like Uber, Lyft, or DoorDash. These platforms offer specific, labour-based services – ride hailing and delivery – and while those who purchase and those who provide these services interact through their apps, they never directly enter into a contract with each other. Instead, each side contracts with the platform, which acts as the provider of the service on the one hand and as the buyer of the required labour on the other.

Many workers and labour advocates meanwhile insist that (most) platforms are employers in disguise: they exercise control over the conditions of work in ways that are compatible only with regular employment. But this claim is not always plausible either. Consider, for instance, TaskRabbit, Thumbtack, or Handy, web- and app-based platforms that allow individuals to advertise to take on a range of tasks, such as running errands, doing repairs, cleaning, and setting up furniture. Unlike Uber or DoorDash, these platforms do not act as the providers of these services. Instead, they offer the infrastructure that permits sellers and buyers of labour (or labour-based services) to connect and securely transact – where this infrastructure includes a vetting and rating system, a procedure for complaints, and the management of payments. Control of this infrastructure yields some control over those who sell their labour through the platforms: algorithms determine how prominently their profiles are displayed, and a breach of the terms of service can result in suspension. But it is not plausible to call these platforms employers in disguise: they grant considerable autonomy to individual workers, allowing them to negotiate pay, to set their own schedule, and to offer and perform work in the ways they see fit.¹⁵

Drawing on studies that examine the organisational structure of labour-based platforms,¹⁶ Steven Vallas and Juliet Schor observe that platforms ‘govern economic transactions not by expanding their control over participants, but by relinquishing important dimensions of control and delegating them to the other two parties of the exchange’.¹⁷ Platforms, they claim, are therefore unlike markets and unlike a typical, hierarchically structured firm, instead constituting a distinct form of governance. Because they simultaneously delegate control and retain power, Vallas and Schor call them ‘permissive potentates’.¹⁸ But while this characterisation may be apt for many platforms, it hardly applies to all – or at least not in the same way. Uber, for instance, allows drivers to decide when to work and which rides to accept; yet, once at work, it exercises considerable control, prescribing for instance permissible attire, the range of acceptable vehicles, and even when drivers are to avoid conversation.¹⁹ Platforms like TaskRabbit, by contrast, grant considerably greater freedom to their workers, but exercise little control. This diversity of platforms, and of the strategies they pursue, is not reflected by the account of Vallas and Schor.

This brief analysis reveals the considerable variation among labour-based platforms. In delineating their range, it may be helpful to start with the two limiting cases.²⁰ On the one hand, there are mere advertisement forums, which allow individuals to advertise their labour-needs or their labour-based services. Craigslist is an example: while Craigslist features posts in many rubrics, a significant number of people use it to publicise job offers and requests. But Craigslist provides little beyond a (lightly moderated) virtual notice board: it does not, for example, vet users, mediate contracts among parties, or operate a rating system. Most importantly, it does not permit customers to contract labour directly through the site (instead, agreements have to be arranged bilaterally). On the other hand, there are platforms-turned-employers, which provide an on-demand service to customers, but rely on an employed workforce to do so. Lieferando, a German food-delivery firm, is an example of this: it gives part-time or full-time contracts to all its drivers, guaranteeing them the state-mandated minimum wage, alongside social insurance, and other benefits; additional bonuses are paid for deliveries.²¹ In Europe, with its strict laws against fictitious self-employment, analogous arrangements exist at grocery delivery firms like Flink and

Gorillas. These companies have in effect turned into regular employers: drivers are allotted shifts in advance, and firms dispatch them according to need.

These two limiting cases suggest a more precise definition of labour-based platforms: they are platforms that (i) directly enable a fine-grained purchase of labour, or labour-based services, where (ii) this labour, or these labour-based services, are provided by workers who are not regularly employed. Among the wide range of platforms that satisfy these conditions, one distinction, already alluded to above, appears particularly pertinent: while some platforms effectively market and sell a specific service themselves, and then purchase the labour required to provide it, others act only as intermediaries. In the first case, we may speak of platform companies. Uber and DoorDash fall into this category: they operate an on-demand business model that relies on simultaneously transacting with those purchasing and those selling a particular labour-based service. In this case, it effectively is the *platform company* that itself purchases the required labour through its platform (which it also uses, on the customer side, to sell its labour-based services). By contrast, in the second case of mere intermediaries, we can speak of *broker platforms*. The likes of TaskRabbit, Thumbtack, and Handy fall into this category: they provide a robust framework for transactions between those selling and those purchasing labour (or labour-based services): they handle payments (of which they take a cut), operate a screening and review process, and provide insurance against various sorts of damages.

3. Labour-Based Platforms and the Threat of Injustice

The platform economy has, over the past years and especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, faced increasingly vocal criticisms over its working conditions. Not only have labour-based platforms drawn fire from their own workers,²² as well as from unions and labour activists,²³ but platform work has also been the subject of scathing accounts in the media²⁴ and in popular books.²⁵ A mostly critical stance is also evident in the work of academics. Sociologists have detailed the manifold hardships of platform work²⁶ and have framed platforms as free riders, whose business is parasitic on that of ordinary employers.²⁷ This section aims to add to the theoretical debate by providing a more nuanced answer to the question: in what ways do labour-based platforms pose a threat to labour justice?

The conditions of platform work have been subject to numerous criticisms, but chief among them are the lack of social insurance and income stability, the relatively low pay, the far-reaching control exercised by platforms, and the difficulty of bonding and organising with fellow platform workers. These problems are of course also observed in other contexts of work: many salespeople are exposed to fluctuations in pay, fast-food workers typically receive low pay, firms like Amazon use extensive surveillance techniques, and unionisation is a struggle in many firms, particularly where workers are geographically dispersed.²⁸ But there is a sense in which, in their combined form, the four issues are particularly pronounced in certain contexts of platform work. Consider, for instance, the ride-hailing behemoth Uber. Because Uber drivers are usually independent contractors (though no longer in the United Kingdom), they are, as the dramatic decrease in ridership during the pandemic illustrated, vulnerable to unexpected shifts in demand.²⁹ Second, while the pay fluctuates, drivers frequently struggle to earn the minimum wage once the expense of operating their vehicles is factored in.³⁰ Third, Uber constantly

monitors drivers and uses models to predict their behaviour, has the power to unilaterally set prices (in the form of take-it-or-leave-it offers), and can modify its access requirements at will (for instance by no longer permitting certain vehicles).³¹ Fourth, the individualised nature of the work, which turns drivers into competitors, makes it hard to organise – there are few opportunities for drivers to meet or bond.³² Note that all these criticisms concern the way platform work is structured, not the occupation itself. There may be additional occupation-related concerns, such as the health effects of spending all day in a driver's seat, but these would apply equally to employees of ordinary firms, such as taxi drivers, chauffeurs, and truckers.

Underpinning these four criticisms is the contention that the way platform work is organised is unjust, and more specifically that workers are treated unjustly. According to Daniel Halliday,³³ this injustice consists in platforms simultaneously denying workers the benefits of employment and the benefits of self-employment.³⁴ Halliday presents the choice between self-employment and employment as one between accepting risk in return for freedom and ceding freedom in return for security.³⁵ The self-employed enjoy numerous freedoms, such as the freedom to directly negotiate over the price of their services, the freedom to self-brand, the freedom to make independent capital investments, and the freedom to decide whether to stay in business.³⁶ By becoming an employee, one gives up these freedoms but obtains security in return: employees are guaranteed a certain pay for their hours spent at work, are entitled to benefits like paid holidays and sick leave, and cannot be fired without notice.³⁷ In Halliday's view, this is not merely a descriptive statement: instead, he contends, that 'employees cede at least some freedoms [...] in return for certain guarantees [is] what employment law and policy, on these matters, should say'.³⁸ But platforms, Halliday argues (primarily by reference to Uber), do not respect this trade-off: they neither offer their workers the guarantees that come with employment nor the freedoms that come with self-employment.³⁹ While Halliday holds that we should conceive of the employer/freelancer distinction as a spectrum,⁴⁰ and that platforms should be free to choose how to balance freedoms and guarantees,⁴¹ he insists that they 'cannot have it *both* ways':⁴² '[i]f a worker is denied the freedoms of a freelancer, then they must (proportionately) receive the guarantees of an employee'.⁴³ According to Halliday, platforms are a threat to labour justice because they tend to ignore this trade-off, denying their workers a just combination of freedoms and guarantees.

Halliday provides an illuminating account of the ways in which platforms can undercut the distinction between employment and self-employment, but his account applies only to platform companies.⁴⁴ While one may question whether Halliday identifies the problem in exactly the right way (is it simply that the platforms simultaneously reap the benefits of employment and self-employment, or that they do so without offering adequate compensation?),⁴⁵ this question does not need to be settled here. What is important, for the purpose of this article, is that Halliday's account cannot shed light on broker platforms. As noted above, those who obtain work through platforms like TaskRabbit or Thumbtack enjoy considerable autonomy: they can set their own prices, engage in self-marketing, decide how to perform their work, and to whom to offer their services. This is not to say that these platforms exercise no control. TaskRabbit screens those who wish to offer work through the platform, its algorithms determine whose profiles feature prominently, and a violation of its terms of service may result in suspension (with limited recourse). But this extent of control is not atypical of ordinary marketplaces: on a farmers' market (just like at a trade fair and a stock exchange), vendors need to accredit themselves, are allotted

locations, and may be suspended for failing to follow the rules.⁴⁶ Because those who acquire work through broker platforms tend to reap the benefits typical of self-employment, Halliday's critique is not applicable here: broker platforms cannot be said to simultaneously deny workers the benefits of employment and the benefits of self-employment.

This prompts the question: how can Halliday's account be complemented? Or, to put it differently: in which ways, if any, do broker platforms pose threats to labour justice?⁴⁷ In principle, there are two ways in which such platforms can pose a threat to labour justice. The first is more immediate: where broker platforms attain a monopolistic position (in some market), they may use their power to take advantage of those who seek work through them. Given that broker platforms generally have an interest in granting users the freedom to find the best arrangement among themselves, the natural way in which they could take advantage would not be by restricting this freedom, but by charging an unreasonably high commission. It is not unconceivable that this could happen. Consider DesignCrowd, a crowdsourcing platform that allows people to initiate a design competition: by posting a request and specifying an award to the winner, a customer invites designers from around the world to submit a proposal and then picks the winning submission.⁴⁸ Given the economies of scale, and network effects, it appears plausible that if a company like DesignCrowd attains a sufficiently dominating market position, it may be in a position to charge high commission fees. Extortion based on market power is thus one threat to labour justice posed by broker platforms.

The second way in which broker platforms can pose a threat to labour justice is more indirect. Recall that, in contrast to platform companies, broker platforms do not purchase labour – instead, their consumers directly enter into an agreement with those who offer their services through the platform. This reveals the possibility that those who purchase labour-based services through a platform – rather than the platform itself – pose a threat to labour justice. This possibility is easily illustrated. Suppose that, in some geographical location, plenty of people offer cleaning services on a given platform, but few people wish to purchase these services. Suppose further that, for a lack of alternatives, those offering cleaning services feel forced to accept very low pay or unsafe working conditions. With the details appropriately filled in, the result may be a form of exploitation. But note, in this case, the role of the platforms is not decisive. As the case has been characterised here, individual customers would end up exploiting the self-employed workers – and the broker platforms would be relegated to the role of enablers.⁴⁹

As the preceding analysis shows, remaining attentive to the variety of labour-based platforms allows for a more nuanced account of the ways in which they can pose threats to labour justice. But it also suggests that, as different as the various threats to labour justice might be, their root cause is identical: it is an imbalance of power that renders workers vulnerable to domination and exploitation.⁵⁰ This is true in the case examined by Halliday: for, yes, it plausibly amounts to an injustice when platforms manage to have it both ways (and without offering compensation), but that they manage to do so reveals an underlying imbalance of power. For if workers were in a stronger bargaining position, they could insist on better treatment. A similar analysis holds for broker platforms: it is a relatively more powerful bargaining position that enables these platforms, or the customers who contract labour through these platforms, to dominate and potentially exploit those seeking work on these platforms.

The proposal to put the power imbalance in the relationship between platforms and workers at the centre of the analysis is further supported by empirical studies on the

experience of platform workers. For what often fades into the background in theoretical debates is that platform workers are a highly heterogeneous group. As Juliet Schor and her co-authors show in a recent study focusing on the United States,⁵¹ they come from all walks of life, including the poorly trained who toil long hours as well as the highly skilled who accept an occasional gig.⁵² And in surveying their experience with platform work, Schor *et al.* find that job satisfaction depends greatly on personal circumstances, yet hardly at all on the type of platform (their sample includes platform companies like Uber as well as broker platforms like TaskRabbit). Specifically, they find that those who rely on platform work for their living (the dependent earners) tend to report exhaustion, powerlessness, and a sense of vulnerability, and even a feeling of being exploited,⁵³ virtually all saying that theirs is a ‘less-than-ideal working arrangement’.⁵⁴ By contrast, those who engage in platform work to earn some extra money but do not depend on the income to cover basic needs (the supplemental earners) tend to be satisfied with their conditions of work. They allow themselves to be selective when it comes to choosing jobs, feel free to occasionally violate platform policies despite the risk of suspension, and state that the opportunity to earn additional money through platform work increases their sense of economic security.⁵⁵ Admittedly, reported levels of satisfaction do not prove that there is no problem – supplemental earners could simply be ignorant of being subjected to an injustice. But there is a principled explanation for why, in the case of supplemental earners, the threat of injustice is greatly reduced: they are in a more independent position vis-à-vis platforms, customers and employers alike, which reduces their vulnerability to domination and exploitation.⁵⁶ The empirical findings thus support the thesis that it is the weak bargaining position of many platform workers that gives rise to a labour injustice, rather than platform work being unjust *per se*.⁵⁷ If, hypothetically, all platform workers became merely supplemental earners, the threat of domination and exploitation would be greatly diminished.⁵⁸

4. Three Strategies for Addressing the Threat of Injustice

The preceding analysis naturally prompts the question: how can the threats of injustice in the various contexts of platform work be countered? This section discusses three approaches: (i) the implementation of tighter work regulations (without changes to the ownership structure of platforms); (ii) the transformation of the ownership and government structure of labour-based platforms by turning them into cooperatives; and (iii) the improvement of the bargaining position of workers through modifications of the social background conditions. Of course, none of these approaches is entirely original: the implementation of tighter regulation of employers, the collectivisation of firms, and the improvement of outside options have all been proposed in the context of regular employment. Yet, or so this article argues, each one holds promise in the context of platform work (although not equally for each type of platform). And if we aim to extend the debate of workplace justice to the relatively novel context of platform work, then analysing their individual and combined potential is a sensible start.

A first strategy for addressing the threat of injustice consists in more tightly regulating labour-based platforms to help protect workers (while allowing them to remain privately run). This strategy is suggested by Halliday’s diagnosis that platforms manage to have it both ways, denying their workers the benefits of employment as well as self-employment.

It appears applicable in particular to platform companies: because they rely on workers to provide a service the company sells, they tend to exercise greater control over them. But it can also be motivated for broker platforms, namely where these platforms enjoy a monopoly power that enables them to exercise far-reaching control or to retain high commission fees. Changes in regulation could take various forms, and these could be tailored to the platform at hand. In the face of powerful platform companies, the state could for instance restrict surveillance techniques or require platforms to be more transparent about pricing algorithms, thereby rendering it more difficult for platforms to deceive and control their workforce. Alternatively, the state could harden laws against fictitious self-employment, thus forcing platform companies to either treat their workers as employees (with all the rights attached to this status) or to yield back the full control over contracting (which is typical of self-employment). A third proposal would be for worker representatives to be allotted a fraction of seats on a platform's governing board to ensure workers retain some control. While more radical, this step would be in line with existing codetermination rules for larger, ordinary companies in countries like Austria and Germany.⁵⁹ Recall that, for broker platforms, the identified threats differ: while workers typically retain the benefits of self-employment, they may be subject to extortion and lack the ability to hold the platform accountable. Accordingly, the state could improve transparency, forcing broker platforms to publicise earnings and potentially capping commission fees; or the state could mandate the publication of algorithms that determine the order in which worker profiles are displayed. These are just examples; alternative regulatory approaches are conceivable. What unites them is that they aim to shift power away from platforms, be it by directly protecting workers from certain forms of treatment or by securing them additional rights.

To varying degrees, states regulate employment relations in all countries, and to the extent to which labour-based platforms are a new phenomenon, it seems sensible to extend regulations to catch up. In fact, this regulatory strategy is already being pursued in numerous jurisdictions. The European Commission, for instance, has proposed new guidelines that aim at securing fair working conditions for platform workers in part by improving transparency.⁶⁰ But often, it has been courts that have weighed in first – by applying existing legislation to platform companies or by instructing lawmakers to create new rules. For instance, the UK Supreme Court ruled in 2021 that Uber's drivers are entitled to worker rights, including the right to paid holidays and to being guaranteed the minimum wage.⁶¹ These approaches, the analysis here suggests, could also be extended to broker platforms.

Another, perhaps even more straightforward way of addressing the power imbalance in the context of platform work is to reform the ownership and governance structure of platforms. The ideal arrangement, some have suggested,⁶² would be for platforms to be run as cooperatives, where workers (and potentially other stakeholders) collectively own and run the platform. This, or so the idea goes, would ensure that platforms operate in ways that reflect the interests of those selling their labour through them. In principle, turning platforms into cooperatives promises benefits both in the case of platform companies and in the case of broker platforms, but the stronger case for pursuing this strategy can arguably be made in the case of platform companies: because these platforms directly sell the services the workers provide, they tend to exercise greater control. While cooperatively run platforms exist, they have typically evolved on the margins. For example, after Uber and Lyft simultaneously withdrew from Austin over regulation disputes, a taxi-driver collective and the nonprofit platform RideAustin stepped into their place.⁶³ Meanwhile, Up &

Go has established itself as a cooperatively run platform that sells cleaning services to private and commercial customers in New York City.⁶⁴ In general, turning workers into the owners and managers of a platform promises not only to remove any existing power imbalances but also to realise the ideal of workplace democracy. Yet there are both theoretical and practical limitations to this approach.

On the theoretical side, note that even when a platform becomes a cooperative, its interests may not align with those of each worker: where workers are a heterogeneous group (consisting of e.g. dependent and supplemental earners), the majority's interests may well diverge from those of specific individuals. A related concern is outsiders: if entry to a platform co-op is restricted, its members enjoy power at the expense of outsiders who would wish to join. This becomes a problem especially when a platform's market power renders it difficult for others to set up a substitute. Moreover, as the case of broker platforms illustrates, even the successful removal of the power imbalance between a platform and its workers does not guarantee that the threat of domination is eliminated: even if TaskRabbit were owned and run by its workers, these workers might collectively confront a shortage of demand and struggle to earn a living. This indicates that although the strategy of transforming the ownership and government structure of platforms holds theoretical promise, it will not serve as an all-purpose solution.

In addition, there are practical challenges. One central impediment is the network-based market power of entrenched platforms: the more drivers a ride-hailing or food-delivery platform has in a given location, for instance, the faster the service it can offer its customers. Such network effects render it difficult for cooperatives to compete against incumbent, privately run platforms. And even in a yet unclaimed market, cooperatives find themselves at a structural disadvantage. Network effects incentivise rapid expansion, and many platforms burn through substantial capital in their early days, prioritising expansion over profitability in a quest to capture the market; but venture capital firms generally decline to invest in cooperatives, and conventional banks are similarly reluctant.⁶⁵ While access to large amounts of capital is less critical in more fragmented markets, where the benefits from size are smaller, even Up & Go heavily relied on starting grants from charities.⁶⁶ A further limiting factor is the governance structure of cooperatives. As Elinor Ostrom's work on the governance of the commons shows,⁶⁷ running a collective enterprise becomes more difficult as the number of participants grows and as the group of participants becomes less stable. But the workforces of today's biggest labour-based platforms number in the millions and many workers hold the job only for a brief period.⁶⁸ It is no coincidence, this suggests, that none of the economic platforms that have turned into a household name operate as a co-op. Successful platform cooperatives exist, demonstrating the model's viability,⁶⁹ but they tend to succeed at the local level, in niche markets, and where capital requirements are modest.

A third strategy for addressing the threat of injustice consists in the improvement of the bargaining position of platform workers through modifications of the social background conditions against which platforms operate. This is an altogether different approach: it tackles the power imbalances and the resulting risks of domination and exploitation not by targeting the platforms, but by targeting everything else – essentially aiming to lower the costs that workers face when walking away. This approach is simultaneously more fundamental and more generic. It is more fundamental because, rather than targeting the specifics of the organisation of labour-based platforms, it aims to shift the overall balance of power in the economy in the favour of workers. It is more generic, meanwhile, because

it could similarly be applied in other labour market contexts where threats of injustice result from a relative lack of power of workers. In practice, this strategy could take a variety of forms, ranging from the moderate to the radical. For example, the state could enhance the outside options of workers by investing in job-training programmes; or it could increase the attractiveness of other jobs, by introducing (higher) minimum wages or by improving the benefits of regular employment. More radically, a state could issue a job guarantee and become the employer of last resort, or it could introduce an unconditional income that covers basic expenses, thereby effectively turning all platform workers into supplemental earners.

This third strategy picks up on a point that frequently gets lost in the debate over the downsides of platform work: those who perform this work have voluntarily chosen to do so, and if they are dissatisfied but endure, then they typically do so for lack of better options. This indicates that if platform workers feel desperate, exhausted, and overburdened, as a significant fraction of dependent earners reports,⁷⁰ then even if platforms bear blame for the particular working conditions,⁷¹ they cannot be blamed for the concomitant lack of outside options.⁷² The portrayal of platforms as villains – whether justified or not – occasionally masks this deeper problem: for at least some people, the labour market fails to provide any attractive options at all. Because of its broader target, this third strategy can equally address the threats of injustice that exist in the context of all labour-based platforms. But it is arguably of particular importance in the context of broker platforms: for regardless of how well these platforms are regulated and organised, workers need decent outside options to be able to insist on adequate conditions when selling their labour to individual customers.

All three strategies – introducing more stringent regulation, turning platforms into cooperatives, and improving the outside options of platform workers – have the potential to tackle the identified threats to labour justice by shifting the balance of power in the favour of workers relative to platforms and customers. They are mutually compatible, and each approach can be pursued in a variety of ways. Which set of measures is most promising will ultimately depend on the type of platform as well as the broader context of the labour market. There is a sense in which the third strategy of rendering workers less dependent on the work obtained through the platform is arguably most significant. First, it alone can effectively tackle the threat of injustice that exists for workers on broker platforms that serve as marketplaces: for in this case, it is the power imbalance between workers and customers, rather than between workers and platforms, that gives rise to concerns about domination and exploitation. Moreover, it targets the threat of injustice in the context of platform work not as an isolated phenomenon, but as one that reflects a broader deficiency of the labour market, thus taking aim at the root cause of the problem quite broadly. And it emanates a particular elegance, too: for instead of directly interfering with the market, it aims to resolve objectionable market outcomes by altering the starting positions of economic agents; this way, it leaves platforms with greater freedom of choosing how to set up their business and workers with greater freedom concerning the way in which they do their work. And as the empirical studies of platform work indicate, this might well be a sensible approach: for the satisfaction reported by workers depends little on the platform they worked with, but a lot on how dependent they were on the income. Yet, where broad social changes are unattainable, the first two strategies provide a helpful framework for smaller, more targeted interventions.

5. Conclusion

This article set out by noting the diversity of labour-based platforms. While the likes of Uber and Lyft, which directly sell services and then hire labour on an on-demand basis to provide them, are often evoked as the epitomes of the platform economy, these platform companies are only the most flamboyant exemplars. Alongside them, broker platforms like TaskRabbit that serve primarily as marketplaces are important as well. And both, platform companies and broker platforms, can be shaped in numerous ways. Remaining alert to this variety is vital if one aims to comprehensively assess, and address, the threats that they pose to labour justice – both because it prevents one from overlooking part of the phenomenon and because it helps one see the deficiencies of specific platforms more sharply. The article attempted to live up to this claim by complementing Halliday’s account of the threat of platforms to labour justice with an analysis of the forms this threat takes in the case of broker platforms. Despite the diversity of threats, the root cause is identical: it is a lack of bargaining power on the part of the workers. To solidify this claim, the article drew on empirical evidence that shows that the primary determinant of job satisfaction is not the type of platform someone works for, but whether they are dependent on this work in making their living. The article then assessed three strategies aimed at countering these threats: stricter regulation, the creation of platform co-ops, and improving the outside options for platform workers. Which concrete form each strategy can take, and how promising it is, will depend on the specific platform, as well as the overall situation on the labour market. While this examination here has remained exploratory, it highlights – I hope – how one ought to proceed. On the one hand, given the variety of platforms, one must be attentive to the structure of a given platform; this is critical because a platform’s structure affects which threats of injustice are of concern. On the other hand, one must be attentive to the labour market within which this platform is embedded, as well as the wider social background conditions; they equally determine which remedial strategies promise to be effective.

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NOTES

- 1 See e.g. Kenney, Martin, and John Zysman. 2016. "The Rise of the Platform Economy." *Issues in Science and Technology* 32(3): 61–9.
- 2 The qualifier that trade-based platforms are limited to the trade of physical goods is critical here. Because the other platforms identified below serve as matchmakers, too, they could be said to be oriented towards a form of trade as well, namely a trade in capital-based or labour-based services.
- 3 See Heinrichs, Harald. 2013. "Sharing Economy: A Potential New Pathway to Sustainability." *Gaia* 22(4): 228–31.
- 4 This is true even of some of the platforms invoked as examples here. While Airbnb is geared towards the short-term lease of capital assets (rooms, apartments, houses), this lease also requires the input of labour: someone must welcome the guests and tidy the apartment after their visit. And while TaskRabbit is used to contract the labour required to complete specific tasks, some tasks require workers to bring along specialised equipment (think of a lawn mower or a snow shovel), which is a capital asset. Strictly speaking, it would thus perhaps be more accurate to locate economic platforms on a three-dimensional spectrum, with trade in physical goods, capital, and labour as the dimensions. In practice, however, one of these aspects will typically be dominant, and it will be evident which.
- 5 See e.g. Scholz, Trebor. 2016. *Uberworked and Underpaid: How Workers Are Disrupting the Digital Economy*. Cambridge: Polity Press; Kessler, Sarah. 2018. *Gigged: The Gig Economy, the End of the Job and the Future of Work*. London: Random House; Semuels, Alana. 2018. "The Online Gig Economy's 'Race to the Bottom.'" *The Atlantic*, August 31. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/08/fiverr-online-gig-economy/569083/>. Accessed 5 March 2022; Aron, Hillel. 2021. "The Intentional Precarity of Gig Work In America." *Noema*, January 26. <https://www.noemamag.com/the-intentional-precarity-of-gig-work-in-america>. Accessed 5 March 2022.
- 6 Mastercard and Kaiser Associates. 2019. "The Global Gig Economy: Capitalizing on a ~\$500B Opportunity." Mastercard Gig Economy Industry Outlook and Needs Assessment, May. <https://newsroom.mastercard.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Gig-Economy-White-Paper-May-2019.pdf>. Accessed 5 March 2022.
- 7 See e.g. Rosenblat, Alex. 2018. *Uberland: How Algorithms are Rewriting the Rules of Work*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press; Ravenelle, Alexandra J. 2019. *Hustle and Gig: Struggling and Surviving in the Sharing Economy*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press; Schor, Juliet. 2020. *After the Gig: How the Sharing Economy Got Hijacked and How to Win it Back*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press; Vallas, Steven, and Juliet Schor. 2020. "What Do Platforms Do? Understanding the Gig Economy," *Annual Review of Sociology* 46 (1): 273–94. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054857>
- 8 See e.g. McDonnell, Anthony, Ronan Carbery, John Burgess, and Ultan Sherman. 2021. "Technologically Mediated Human Resource Management in the Gig Economy." *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 32(19): 3995–4015. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1986109>; van Doorn, Niels, and Julie Yujie Chen. 2021. "Odds Stacked Against Workers: Datafied Gamification on Chinese and American Food Delivery Platforms." *Socio-Economic Review* 19(4): 1345–67. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwab028>
- 9 Cholbi, Michael, and Michael Weber. 2020. *The Future of Work, Technology, and Basic Income*. New York: Routledge.
- 10 Anderson, Elizabeth. 2017. *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Do Not Talk about It)*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- 11 See e.g. Halliday, Daniel. 2021. "On the (Mis)Classification of Paid Labor: When Should Gig Workers Have Employee Status?" *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 20(3): 229–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470594X211015467>; Muldoon, James, and Paul Raekstad. 2022. "Algorithmic Domination in the Gig Economy." *European Journal of Political Theory* 1–21 (online first). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14748851221082078>. See also Bieber, Friedemann, and Jakob Moggia. 2021. "Risk Shifts in the Gig Economy: The Normative Case for an Insurance Scheme Against the Effects of Precarious Work." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 29(3): 281–304. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12233>. For an attempt to map the ethical questions surrounding the gig economy, further see Tan, Zhi Ming, Nikita Aggarwal, Josh Cowsls, Jessica Morley, Mariarosaria Taddeo, and Luciano Floridi. 2021. "The Ethical Debate about the Gig Economy: A Review and Critical Analysis." *Technology in Society* 65: 101594. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2021.101594>
- 12 Halliday op. cit.
- 13 Several court battles have been fought over this question, with varying outcomes (Halliday op. cit., p. 230).
- 14 Vallas and Schor op. cit., p. 273.

- 15 One could question whether autonomy is a defining criterion of self-employment in the way suggested here. Specifically, one might argue that even employed workers remain fully autonomous because firms do not in fact have any authority over them. What firms enjoy instead is control, which is based on the threat of dismissal, but control is similarly exercised by customers over the self-employed. Yet I believe that this view is not entirely plausible: labour contracts *de facto* put many firms into a position of (at least limited) authority over their workers. For discussion of whether such managerial authority can be justified, see e.g. McMahon, Christopher. 2017. *Authority and Democracy. A General Theory of Government and Management*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- 16 See Aneesh, A. 2009. "Global Labor: Algorocratic Modes of Organization." *Sociological Theory* 27(4): 347–70. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2009.01352.x>; Kornberger, Martin, Dane Pflueger, and Jan Mouritsen. 2017. "Evaluative Infrastructures: Accounting for Platform Organization." *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 60: 79–95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aos.2017.05.002>
- 17 Vallas and Schor op. cit., p. 281.
- 18 Vallas and Schor op. cit., p. 281. Vallas and Schor contrast this understanding with four existing 'images of platform work', namely as 'incubators of entrepreneurialism' (activating idle resources through sharing), 'digital cages' (algorithms taking over the management), 'accelerants of precarity' (dramatic negative shift of the position of the workforce), and 'institutional chameleons' (platforms taking a variety of forms responding to their environment) (op. cit., pp. 277–81).
- 19 On this last point, see Siegel, Rachel. 2019. "There Are No Words for Uber's Latest Perk." *Washington Post*, May 17. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/05/17/there-are-no-words-ubers-latest-perk/>. Accessed 17 May 2022.
- 20 I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for pointing me to Craigslist and for pressing me to reconsider and revise my initial claim that platforms-turned-employers could still count as platforms.
- 21 Schreyer, Jasmin. 2021. "Algorithmic Work Coordination and Workers' Voice in the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case of Foodora/Lieferando." *Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation* 15(1): 69–84. <https://doi.org/10.13169/workorgalaboglob.15.1.0069>. Note that restaurants can also choose to take care of deliveries themselves (and many apparently do), in which case work arrangements may differ (ibid., p. 74).
- 22 Sainato, Michael. 2019. "'They Treat Us like Crap': Uber Drivers Feel Poor and Powerless on Eve of IPO." *The Guardian*, May 7. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/may/07/uber-drivers-feel-poor-powerless-ipo-looms>. Accessed 6 March 2022.
- 23 Trades Union Congress. 2021. "Gig Economy Workforce in England and Wales Has Almost Tripled in Last Five Years – New TUC Research." TUC, November 5. <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/gig-economy-workforce-england-and-wales-has-almost-tripled-last-five-years-new-tuc-research>. Accessed 6 March 2022.
- 24 See e.g. Tolentino, Jia. 2017. "The Gig Economy Celebrates Working Yourself to Death." *The New Yorker*, March 22. <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/jia-tolentino/the-gig-economy-celebrates-working-yourself-to-death>. Accessed 6 March 2022; Thompson, Derek. 2019. "The Real Trouble with Silicon Valley." *The Atlantic*, December 17. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/01/wheres-my-flying-car/603025/>. Accessed 6 March 2022; Conger, Kate, Adam Satariano, and Mike Isaac. 2020. "Pandemic Erodes Gig Economy Work." *The New York Times*, March 18. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/18/technology/gig-economy-pandemic.html>. Accessed 6 March 2022.
- 25 See e.g. Kessler op. cit.
- 26 See e.g. Rosenblat op. cit. and Ravenelle op. cit.
- 27 Schor op. cit., pp. 71–2.
- 28 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for making this observation, and for pressing me to specify that it is the simultaneous, combined occurrence of these four features that sets platform work apart.
- 29 See Spurk, Daniel, and Caroline Straub. 2020. "Flexible Employment Relationships and Careers in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 119: 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103435>
- 30 See e.g. Stanford, Jim. 2018. "Subsidising Billionaires: Simulating the Net Incomes of UberX Drivers in Australia." Report, Centre for Future Work, March 6. <https://apo.org.au/node/135471>. Accessed 13 March 2022, who estimates net incomes in Australia.
- 31 Möhlmann, Mareike, and Ola Henfridsson. 2019. "What People Hate About Being Managed by Algorithms, According to a Study of Uber Drivers." *Harvard Business Review*, August 30. <https://hbr.org/2019/08/what-people-hate-about-being-managed-by-algorithms-according-to-a-study-of-uber-drivers>. Accessed 2 November 2022; Halliday op. cit., pp. 238–39.

- 32 Tassinari, Arianna, and Vincenzo Maccarrone. 2020. "Riders on the Storm: Workplace Solidarity among Gig Economy Couriers in Italy and the UK." *Work, Employment and Society* 34(1): 35–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017019862954>
- 33 Halliday op. cit.
- 34 For a distinct, yet related argument that the shift towards gig work often involves an uncompensated (and thus unjust) transfer of risk from businesses onto workers and society at large, see Bieber and Moggia op. cit.
- 35 Halliday op. cit., p. 231.
- 36 Halliday op. cit., pp. 235–39.
- 37 Halliday op. cit., p. 234.
- 38 Halliday op. cit., p. 231.
- 39 In Halliday's view, '[t]hey get to behave like employers when it comes to directing workers [...] and get to behave like mere brokers when it comes to not providing workers with relevant guarantees' (op. cit., p. 241).
- 40 Halliday op. cit., p. 243.
- 41 Halliday op. cit., p. 245.
- 42 Halliday op. cit., p. 243, italics in the original.
- 43 Halliday op. cit., p. 243.
- 44 I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for in effect suggesting that I develop this argument instead of dwelling on the question whether compensation is a hidden third component that Halliday neglects.
- 45 Consider a person who gives up the security characteristic of employment and the freedoms characteristic of self-employment, but in return for a *very* high expected wage: would this person be subjected to an injustice, and in exactly the same way as a person taking this job for a lower expected wage (where, assume, the two are identical in all other regards)? Even if one were to insist – plausibly, in my view – that money cannot always compensate for a deprivation of other goods, it appears plausible that a person's expected compensation can sometimes affect whether an arrangement is to be considered just. While Halliday suggests that expected earnings are a determinant of security, this appears plausible only over time, but not for the isolated, high-risk job that may result in zero earnings.
- 46 While more established vendors and traders typically have at least some say in the rules of the marketplace, which may be run by a trade collective (or operated in other ways that give stakeholders a voice), new entrants are subjected to existing rules in much the same way as a new tasker is.
- 47 These are relevant questions. For while the greater size of platform companies provides some justification for the common focus on them, broker platforms are by no means insignificant. With a reported 140,000 people selling their labour on TaskRabbit (TaskRabbit. 2019. "TaskRabbit Fact Sheet April 2019." April. https://www.taskrabbit.com/press/April_2019_Fact_Sheet.pdf. Accessed 29 August 2022), the platform is dwarfed by Uber, which claims nearly five million drivers globally (BBC News. 2022. "Uber Attracts Record Number of Drivers as Cost of Living Bites." August 2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-62396648>. Accessed 2 August 2022), but is quite large nonetheless.
- 48 The exact procedure is somewhat more complicated. DesignCrowd takes a heavy cut but also pays out some of this money to the runners-up and a certain (mostly symbolic) sum to all participants.
- 49 Platforms may here be enablers in a weaker, instrumental sense (allowing customers to exercise a power they already had) or in a stronger, amplifying sense (allowing customers to exercise more far-reaching power over workers than they otherwise could have). I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this.
- 50 On the link between exploitation and vulnerability in the sense of a weak bargaining position, see e.g. Valdman, Mikhail. 2009. "A Theory of Wrongful Exploitation." *Philosophers' Imprint* 9(6): 1–14; Liberto, Hallie. 2014. "Exploitation and the Vulnerability Clause." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 17: 619–29. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-014-9494-z>
- 51 Schor, Juliet, William Attwood-Charles, Mehmet Cansoy, Isak Ladegaard, and Robert Wengronowitz. 2020. "Dependence and Precarity in the Platform Economy." *Theory and Society* 49(5): 833–61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-020-09408-y>
- 52 At just 112, their sample size is relatively small. Yet despite the relative abundance of first-hand accounts of platform work and portrayals of platform workers, there do not appear to exist bigger, cross-sectional studies on the experiences of workers for a variety of platforms; on this, see also Schor *et al.* op. cit., p. 834.
- 53 Schor *et al.* op. cit., pp. 847–51.
- 54 Schor *et al.* op. cit., p. 849.
- 55 Schor *et al.* op. cit., pp. 845–47. Schor *et al.* also include an intermediate, third category, the 'partly dependent group' (op. cit., p. 841), which consists of those who have income from multiple sources (which could be

- multiple platforms). I set this category aside here as the experience of partly dependent earners, unexpectedly, falls in between.
- 56 Of the four concerns raised at the section's outset, only the inability to organise applies equally to supplemental earners.
- 57 While Schor *et al.* do not look at what I have here labelled 'platforms-turned-employers', there is good reason to expect that the findings would be similar, with supplemental earners more satisfied and dependent earners more vulnerable. For while work contracts provide some security (at a cost of freedom), conditions will still tend to be harsh and pay modest – at Lieferando, for instance, workers continue to stage protests over the conditions of work. On this, see Schreyer *op. cit.*
- 58 At the social level, there might still be reason to be concerned with free riding. Absent a universal income, the existence of supplemental earners presupposes that other firms offer more stable employment (setting aside the special cases of pensioners and the independently wealthy). But in this case, platforms get the benefits of a readily available workforce without paying the costs of regular employment – they are thus free-riding on the other firms who offer regular employment (on this thought, see also Schor *et al. op. cit.*, p. 835). While I believe that this concern has some basis, it should not be overstated. If all those working for platforms were merely supplemental earners, then they would insist on attractive conditions, making platforms pay dearly for their flexible services. (There might still be a worry about platforms reaping monopoly profits, but this is a different concern.)
- 59 Jäger, Simon, Shakked Noy, and Benjamin Schoefer. 2021. "What Does Codetermination Do?" *ILR Review* 75(4): 857–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00197939211065727>
- 60 Bednarowicz, Bartłomiej. 2019. "Delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights: The New Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions in the European Union." *Industrial Law Journal* 48(4): 604–23. <https://doi.org/10.1093/indlaw/dwz021>
- 61 Butler, Sarah. 2021. "Uber Drivers Entitled to Workers' Rights, UK Supreme Court Rules." *The Guardian*, February 19. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/feb/19/uber-drivers-workers-uk-supreme-court-rules-rights>. Accessed 8 March 2022. Meanwhile, Spain's government codified a ruling by its supreme court that routine drivers for ride-hailing or delivery platforms are to be assigned the status of employees. On this, see Meaker, Morgan. 2021. "The Gig Economy's Days in Europe Are Numbered." *Wired*, October 12. <https://www.wired.com/story/gig-economy-european-commission-law/>. Accessed 8 March 2022.
- 62 See e.g. Solel, Yifat. 2019. "If Uber Were a Cooperative: A Democratically Biased Analysis of Platform Economy." *The Law and Ethics of Human Rights* 13(2): 239–62. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lehr-2019-2007>
- 63 See Solel *op. cit.*, p. 240.
- 64 Haas, Michaela. 2020. "When Someone Hires Me, They Get the Boss Herself." *The New York Times*, July 7. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/07/opinion/gig-economy-immigrants-fair-wage.html>. Accessed 7 March 2022.
- 65 Schor *op. cit.*, p. 171.
- 66 Haas *op. cit.* The (at least in part) cooperatively run photographer platform Stocksy United, which is often heralded as another success story, also critically benefitted from capital reserves of its founders. Schor *op. cit.*, pp. 149, 171.
- 67 Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 68 Kerr, Dara. 2018. "Lyft Grows Gangbusters in 2017, Bringing Competition to Uber." *CNET*. <https://www.cnet.com/tech/tech-industry/lyft-sees-massive-growth-brings-uber-competition/>. Accessed 5 March 2022.
- 69 See Conger, Kate. 2021. "A Worker-Owned Cooperative Tries to Compete with Uber and Lyft." *The New York Times*, May 28. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/28/technology/nyc-uber-lyft-the-drivers-cooperative.html>. Accessed 28 May 2022.
- 70 Schor *et al. op. cit.*
- 71 They bear blame if they in fact treat their workers unjustly; the mere fact that workers feel desperate or overburdened does not imply that this is the case.
- 72 It is possible that they bear some blame, namely where the existence of the platform negatively affects more ordinary employers, thereby diminishing the availability or attractiveness of regular jobs. But while it is plausible that the creation of ride-hailing firms had a negative effect on existing taxi companies, their impact on working conditions in the overall job market (including the job market for the lower skilled) has been rather limited.