



Centre on Labour and Sustainable Production

Workers' struggles and capitalist strategies: Perspectives from Africa and South America in an age of 'sustainability'

Workshop Report

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Workers' struggles and capitalist strategies: Perspectives from Africa and South America in an age of 'sustainability'

Speakers

- Angela Dziedzom Akorsu** School for Development Studies, University of Cape Coast, Ghana
- Maurizio Atzeni** Faculty of Business and Economics, Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Chile
- Dario Azzellini** Autonomous University of Zacatecas, Mexico;
Visiting scholar, ILR School, Cornell University, US
- Jörg Nowak** Universidade de Brasília, Brazil
- Rose Omamo** General Secretary, Amalgamated Union of Kenya Metal Workers (AUKMW), Kenya
- Julia Soul** National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CEIL-CONICET), Argentina
- Dzodzi Tsikata** Department of Development Studies, SOAS University of London

Two-day workshop

Monday 17 and Tuesday 18 June 2024

Including a history walking tour on Tuesday afternoon

10:00 to 18:00

Graduate Centre, Room GC201
Queen Mary University of London,
Mile End Road, E1 4NS

Register at:



<https://bit.ly/CLaSP2024>



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Workers' struggles and capitalist strategies: Perspectives from Africa and South America in an age of 'sustainability'

Workshop Abstract

A workshop was held by the Centre on Labour and Sustainable Production (CLASP) at Queen Mary University of London on 17 and 18 June 2024. This working paper compiles the original concept note and session design, the list of participants and a report on the discussion. The workshop was organised by Elena Baglioni, Liam Campling, Shreya Sinha, Isadora Cruxên and Caterina Rossi. The workshop report was drafted by Dara Leyden and Siddharth Chakravarty.

Background

Even as a sustainability agenda is being mainstreamed across business and policymaking, it is defined predominantly through environmental considerations. This is important but it overlooks the critical social dimension of sustainability. Through a range of events and workshops in recent years, the Centre on Labour, Sustainability and Global Production (CLaSP) has emphasized the need to combine perspectives on ecology and labour for a sustainability agenda that is transformative and not piecemeal and status-quoist.

Building on this past work, the Centre's end-of-year event in 2024 focussed on an open-ended analysis of struggles and strategies by the 'labouring classes' in the contexts of shifting capitalist strategies and varied ecological crises, from global heating to localised crop disease; in other words, it focussed on rethinking structures of capital from below. It focussed on Africa and South America as two of the largest regions of the global South, which are already being disproportionately impacted by climate change, and on varied sectors like agricultural, logistics and manufacturing within them.

We ask: how is environmental change impacting workers across different sectoral and regional contexts? How are the strategies of capital transforming in response to environmental change and demands for just transition? How are workers and their organizations/unions responding to these changes? What kinds of historical legacies of collective action/struggle are shaping their response? What possibilities and contradictions emerge with the loss of key sites of organised working class power as a result of 'sustainability transitions'? What kind of (dis)articulations exist between formal trade unions and informal grassroots organizing and between production and social reproduction? What dilemmas and opportunities exist in building solidarities with subaltern communities who may not see themselves as part of the labouring classes? Finally, what are the strategies for workers' education being used, what can be learned from different contexts and how can we bridge struggles and build wider solidarities?

Held over two days at Queen Mary University of London, the event consisted of two panels on Monday 17 June, and a roundtable discussion on Tuesday 18 June.

Speakers:

Angela Dziedzom Akorsu, School for Development Studies. University of Cape Coast, Ghana

Maurizio Atzeni, CEIL/CONICET Argentina and Facultad de Economía y Negocios, Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Chile

Dario Azzellini, Autonomous University of Zacatecas, Mexico

Jörg Nowak, Universidade de Brasilia, Brazil

Rose Omamo, General Secretary, Amalgamated Union of Kenya Metal Workers, Kenya

Julia Soul, National Scientific and Technical Research Council, CEIL/Centro de Estudios e Investigaciones Laborales, TEL/Taller de Estudios Laborales, Argentina

Workshop Report: Part one – Workshop sessions

Session 1: Structures of capital in logistics and manufacturing

The first session analysed regional and sectoral strategies of capital, with the aim of grounding contemporary transformations in place. For example, we requested our speakers to hold these questions when responding: What are contemporary capitalist strategies vis-a-vis workers and their communities? What are the major challenges posed by capital in given industries and contexts? In what ways is environmental change affecting workers and communities in different industries and contexts? How is capital adjusting to challenges associated with the ecological crisis and just transition demands?

Speakers: Joerg Nowak, Brazil; Rose Omamo, Kenya; Maurizio Atzeni, Argentina.

Chair: Liam Campling, Queen Mary University of London.

Session summary:

The session focussed on the evolving strategies of capital in the logistics sector in Brazil and Argentina, and the automotive sector in Kenya and Argentina.

Joerg Nowak introduced the case of Brazil's logistics industry to explore recent transformations in capital's strategies in relation to workers and ecology. Brazil's agri-export economy is highly dependent on road haulage, with road representing 61% of national freight, as compared to 43% in the US and 35% in China. Given this dependence, Nowak poses the question of why a large-scale strike by 400,000 drivers in 2018 achieved only limited success? Nowak identifies a 'triple attack' strategy by capital to respond to labour and ecological challenges: first, the platformization of haulage has expanded rapidly in recent years, covering 50% of road freight by 2022; second, digital optimisation of routes has been implemented to achieve cost-savings, but is being presented as 'ecological optimisation'; and third, there appears to be a move towards waterways and railways to reduce costs of longer-distance freight. The growth of algorithmic management emerged as a cross-cutting theme throughout the workshop (see Part Two). Capital's strategies would reduce both emissions and the number of truckers but face various limits and contradictions. For example, many routes are unattractive to transport companies due to low volumes and poor roads; Brazil's freight also has seasonal peaks linked to harvest periods that require a large number of drivers; digitalisation requires new qualifications that few truckers possess; and the latter could combine with long-term trends towards a shrinking workforce, which could result in worker shortages. Finally, Nowak raised various reasons for truckers' low engagement with ecological challenges, including the perceived threats of ecology issues to truckers, the structure of the workforce as predominantly self-employed and unorganised, and the fragmentation among existing unions.

Rose Omamo shared insights from organising the automotive industry in Kenya, focussing on the connection between the ecological transition and workers' skills. The Amalgamated Union of Kenya Metal Workers represents both formal and informal automotive workers in Kenya. The former work under regulated employment contracts in assembly factories, whereas the latter work as repair mechanics under unregulated contracts. Although informal workers are highly skilled, they lack

formal qualifications. The union has worked with relevant state departments and employers to develop courses that certify worker's skills, enabling them to seek more secure work and promotions. Rose highlighted the multi-faceted impact of climate change on the automotive industry, including supply chain disruptions in raw materials, energy shortages caused by weather variations that affect hydropower generation, heat stress among workers, new environmental regulations for vehicles affecting the labour process and market demand, and political instability. Rose highlighted a cross-cutting theme regarding the connection between ecology and technological change, reflected in the shift towards electric vehicles, vehicle digitisation and changes in the labour process. The latter generates new insecurity risks for workers that will require new skills and qualifications to overcome.

Maurizio Atzeni linked the prior two discussions by drawing connections between transformations in the logistics and automotive industry in Argentina. The growth of platformization in Argentinian logistics has accompanied the shift from physical retail stores to warehousing, increasing the demand for delivery. In the warehouses of leading platform Mercado Libre, work is subject to algorithmic management. All items are scanned on an app that also tracks worker's movements, including toilet breaks, and rates their productivity. Capital reconfigures the app to intensify and deskill the labour process, resulting in health problems and the informalisation of work. 90% of workers are now hired on casual, temporary contracts through agencies. Maurizio highlights how the shrinking number of formal workers has weakened the trade union, which raises the question of how best to organise such informalized workers. In Argentina's automotive industry, capital has achieved deskilling through the digitisation of labour processes. Robotisation and data collection have shifted work from skilled production to machine operation, reducing workers' power to disrupt the labour process and thus weakening collective bargaining. As with earlier discussants, Maurizio highlights several limits and contradictions to capital's strategies. For example, the machines often break down, requiring skilled workers to fix them and thus creating new bottlenecks in the labour process that are vulnerable to disruption.

Discussion:

In the open discussion, questions were raised regarding the relationship between formal and self-employed workers in each context. Joerg explained that in Brazil, there is a hierarchy of rights between employed and self-employed workers. Employed truckers can join trade unions to bargain with their employers. In contrast, self-employed truckers are paid by contracting companies and have formed associations instead of unions to place demands on the state, resulting in a separation of their respective collective actions. Responding to a question about the truckers' political orientations, Joerg noted a fluidity whereby many of the truckers who supported President Bolsonaro subsequently became disillusioned and turned to the left. In Kenya, Rose explained that self-employed automotive workers often target local authorities with their demands regarding shelter, sanitary facilities and health and safety. In Argentina, Maurizio explained that in both logistics and automotive, a hierarchy exists between formal and precarious contracts, but *within* the same employers. All discussants noted the difficulties of organising these increasingly segmented workforces.

Regarding the challenges of organising informalized workers, Rose highlighted several union initiatives to organise informal workers in Kenya. In addition to recognising workers' skills with

appropriate and accessible qualifications, the union provides training in bargaining and negotiation with local authorities. Politically, the union advocates for legislation to extend social security to informal workers. For formal workers, the union advocates for contractual protections for workers relating to ecological issues, such as monitoring and managing heat stress.

Panellists reflected on capital's potential vulnerabilities arising from transformations in labour processes and global value chain structures. Maurizio expanded on the impact of digitalisation and robotisation in Argentinian automotive assembly lines on the potential for workers' collective action. He noted that different value chain structures make some models more vulnerable than others. For example, Argentina is a major producer of Toyota pick-up trucks, but other brands and models are manufactured in Brazil and merely assembled in Argentina. For particular models, labour processes are more likely to represent choke points due to their connections to other processes. Maurizio provided the example of gear box production, where the gear cogs are manufactured by machines that must be configured by skilled workers, but frequently need to be re-calibrated in a short space of time. The vulnerable points of robotized just-in-time production processes have therefore shifted from assembly to machine calibration. Digitalisation also provides novel opportunities for disruption due to the large amount of data that needs to be processed. This could imply that workers could stop scanning forms to disrupt the data flows and thus undermine the monitoring process. In Brazil, Joerg noted that platforms are spreading rapidly. However, for self-employed truckers, platforms may in fact help to increase worker identity and consciousness rather than suppress it.

Session 2: Worker's creativity, education and the co-production of knowledge of capital

Shifting from the perspectives of capital to the perspectives of labour on sustainability transitions, panellists reflected on questions of worker education and creativity. For example: How do workers and communities think about capital on the ground? What education / co-production / participatory research is being used and developed (e.g. workshops of workers' creativity)? How can we learn from each other? In what ways (if at all) has capital responded to bottom-up worker-led strategies? What are the institutional and non-institutional dimensions of workers' creativity and education? How can we unpack 'workers' education'?

Speakers: Angela D. Akorsu, Ghana; Dario Azzellini, Mexico; Julia Soul, Argentina.

Chair: Isadora Cruxên, Queen Mary University of London.

Session summary:

This session explored examples of workers' education and the co-production of knowledge in sub-Saharan Africa and South America in relation to capital's strategies regarding ecological and workforce challenges.

Angela explained that in Ghana there are variations in how workers view capital depending on their geographical location, industry, social location and lived realities, but that resistance to capital is led by organised labour. The importance of worker education for engaging effectively with capital informs the objectives of the Department of Labour at the University of Cape Coast, which has a

Memorandum of Understanding with the Ghana TUC and works with unions to co-design educational programmes and conduct co-research. Educational programmes are tailored to different worker's needs, ranging from diplomas and certificates to MPhil and PhD programmes. Joint research initiatives have been supported by the ILO, including four unionists working with university staff to undertake data collection and analysis. Opportunities for short vocational courses are also being explored. Capital has responded to initiatives in several forms, including pushback in the form of intimidation and union-busting; by offering minor concessions; and various strategies to re-organise and casualise work through platforms.

Dario provided an overview of worker-led education initiatives in South America, focussing on factories taken under workers' control. There are significant variations amongst the different national political economies. For example, initiatives in Mexico are inhibited by corruption; in Venezuela, unions increased their strength under Chavez but have since been co-opted and workers' struggles faced repression; and in Colombia, unions have receded in a context of violent repression. Nevertheless, three unions in Colombia's energy sector have been proactive in engaging with indigenous organisations and farmers to explore sustainable energy models and are in favour of phasing out fossil fuels. The government has adopted policy ideas from these roundtables, but energy sovereignty still trumps sustainability. In Venezuela, workers occupied a closed aluminium smelting production line and implemented more sustainable production practices, for example by recycling wastewater. Other worker initiatives in Venezuela include a workers' university and a 'productive workers army' that visit other state or worker-occupied factories to share learnings and fix machinery. The movement of factories under workers' control holds continental and global transnational gatherings and exchanges to share insights and provide worker education. Dario ended by noting that capital typically pushes back on all of these initiatives.

Julia distinguished two models of workers education and research in Argentina. The first involves experts providing knowledge to workers in training locations, whereby workers are passive recipients of knowledge. The second involves the mutual production of knowledge, which can proceed within workplaces, drawing on workers' knowledge and experience. The latter can challenge loyalty to bosses as gatekeepers of knowledge, enhance cooperation between workers, build solidarity, and help to confront managerial strategies. Julia provides the example of the 'Labour Studies Workshop' initiative, a group of social scientists and lawyers aiming to train both rank-and-file unionists and ununionized co-workers. Among other programs, this group conducted co-research on workplace health and safety (H&S) by forming a mixed committee of unionists and educated labour activists with a teachers' union in Buenos Aires. The research was collectively designed and undertaken, resulting in three H&S campaigns that forced the government to recognise some links between illnesses and unhealthy working conditions. Julia concludes that workplaces are critical sites of worker co-production of knowledge.

In the open discussion, questions were raised about the tensions between academic work structures and useful research for/with workers. Maurizio referenced difficulties arising from academic workloads and incentives to publish in journals that are not accessible to workers. Liam highlighted how, in contrast to workers, capital is adept at learning from publications, but academics can still leverage their position and skills to pursue goals beyond publishing, particularly strategic action research that can benefit workers in real-time. Liam noted that

academics have not yet realised the potential of such research and asked the panellists to expand on examples of funding and collaboration structures for co-research.

Angela explained how activist academics at Ghana's University of Cape Coast have developed strong relationships with unions to understand their strategic and informational needs, such that effective data can be provided quickly to assist unions in negotiations and advocacy. Angela emphasised the importance of balancing funding needs against the interests and politics of funders. Equally, strategic documentation should be both accessible and exclusive to workers, so that capital cannot use the research to heighten exploitation. Julia explained that the 'Labour Studies Workshop' in Argentina received various grants, but since 2010 most of the funding has come from unions. Julia also highlighted the potential to promote worker education in academic 'outreach' papers that are promoted by universities as means to enhance research impact.

Joerg raised several limitations of conducting outreach work, including a lack of time, fewer incentives and university obligations for outreach to target non-worker elite actors. Limitations also apply to funded research with unions. For example, German and Dutch foundations typically impose a European model of social-democratic industrial relations. At the University of Cape Coast, Angela explained that outreach is built into the programmes and targets relevant actors. For example, researchers in the Labour Department target unionists. On the risks of donor co-optation, Angela agreed that unions are accepting too much sponsorship from NGOs while collecting fewer dues from union members. Responding to a question about the need to also provide political education to labour, Angela noted that different political regimes have indeed shaped and constrained labour's strategies. For example, regimes that engage with labour can raise the risk of co-optation. Rose added that unions typically need permission from donors to pursue themes that are priorities for workers, for example, just transition grants typically do not support collective bargaining.

The theme of workplace versus community action emerged during the session, building on the prior session's discussion of formal versus informal work. Dario highlighted how processes of class formation occur within communities, but that social struggles often do not expand beyond local scales without alliances with the industrial working class. Angela noted that 90% of workers in Ghana are informal and much collective action occurs outside workplaces in novel ways, such as platform drivers organising themselves through social media on smartphones. Rose highlighted that in Kenya unions are engaging more with community-based groups, while informal associations are also engaging with unions to support informal workers with e.g. resisting forms of harassment. A forward-looking strategy adopted by trade unions is to reduce the separation between workplaces and homeplaces. Julia concurred that in Argentina strategies to bridge the workplace-homeplace divide are growing in popularity.

Session 3: Roundtable on contours of strategy and struggle from below

Bringing together experiences and learnings from Sessions 1 and 2 we open up the discussion to questions of strategy. For example: What forms does struggle against capital take in ‘sustainability’ transitions? How can we bridge struggles and build solidarities for transformative sustainability and sustainable work? How are (might?) workers responding to socio-ecological change? Are any activities articulating workplace and social reproduction struggles on the ground, and what is the scope for their development (e.g. grassroots organising, worker education)?

Speakers: Angela D. Akorsu, Ghana; Maurizio Atzeni, Chile; Dario Azzellini, Mexico; Joerg Nowak, Brazil; Rose Omamo, Kenya; Julia Soul, Argentina.

Co-chairs: Elena Baglioni and Shreya Sinha, Queen Mary University of London.

Session summary:

The session brought together the themes and the speakers from Day 1 of the workshop with the primary aim to discuss and highlight strategies that workers and their organisations were engaging in. This included direct workplace struggles— and impediments— in response to capital’s reorganising of work, struggles in response to direct heat-related and other climatic stressors, and struggles being formulated outside of the workplace—in communities, in homes, in religious spaces. The speakers framed their contributions in regard to two ongoing shifts in how work is changing: one, worker monitoring under algorithmic management systems, and two, the future of work under just transition.

The first three speakers made remarks on strategies across three cross-cutting themes: one, strategies that develop in formal and informal work regimes; two, strategies that articulate across the spheres of production, reproduction and ecology; three, strategies that are scalar from the micro-level through to meso- and macro-levels of institutions and societies, attempting to straddle the global production network of commodities.

Rose Omamo presented four arenas of action that were key to formal workers in the automotive industry in Kenya. The first was **Dialogue**, that is, the ability for workers to engage with a wide range of stakeholders to inform and be informed about policies. The second was **Education**, on the urgent and crucial need to inform workers on topics related to climate change and the environment, how this affects them at work as well as shapes the future of work and sustainability, and on green jobs and just transition. The third was **Advocacy**, to develop workers’ inputs in the policy sphere with relation to not only sustainable development and a fair transition into new jobs, but to also add social security and to reduce precarity in the current work regimes. Finally, she premised these actions on the principles of **Equity and Justice**, central pillars to make the transition inclusive, especially for vulnerable communities, and to expand the scope of partnerships and the base of workers’ struggles.

Angela Akorsu highlighted the growing share of informal workers in the continent of Africa’s economy, while also crucially shedding light on the numerous and novel ways in which workers in the informal economy were organising. Her key intervention was that organising informal workers

required strategies that were different to the strategies of formal workers being organised under trade unions, and that organising across the bridge between the formal and informal workers was crucial. Angela also highlighted four strategies to combat capital. The first is **Research**, regarding how academic institutions need to revisit the (currently) asymmetrical relationship with workers and adopt new and bespoke research outputs that aid workers' struggles. The second strategy of **Policy engagement** echoed the previous speaker's comments on education and advocacy; better informed workers were better equipped to inform and lead on policy changes from workers' perspectives. The third strategy regards organising informal workers and the need for **Funding**; without formal membership-based structures, there is a challenge to raise funds to support workers, and at the same time, a dire need to develop independent fund-raising mechanisms to be able to function autonomously. Finally, Angela discussed **Flexibility** in workers' struggles, which means the agility to respond to capital's restructuring and its undermining of workers' struggles.

Maurizio Atzeni reflected on the arenas that are crucial to workers' struggles. Highlighting the micro-level of the workplace as the most effective node of resisting capital. Maurizio also added that this was where workers were increasingly being managed algorithmically, and therefore is an arena of struggle that must be reinvigorated. The co-production of knowledge to better understand these shifts and to allow for the emergence of new strategies in the labour process are vital. At the meso-level, while acknowledging that institutions and the state can be reformist, active engagement was needed to exploit possibilities that existed and could be used to favour workers' struggles. Finally, at the macro-level, a broad political strategy that reflected the current era of globalisation is important. Here he highlighted the continuation of dispersed and fragmented global production networks, the growing share of informal and platform-based workers and the reemergence of extractivism in Latin America to feed the just transition. The changing nature of work and the impact of capitalist development means that a large diversity of workers and communities are affected. While trade unions have traditionally been the arena of struggle, new strategies and alliances are needed to establish fresh coalitions, reinvigorate the soul in workers' resistance strategies and rediscover class within trade unions.

The second set of speakers built upon the previous speaker's comments to address the following themes: one, building a new class consciousness that encompasses the contemporary challenges facing workers and two, articulating struggles across the divides of production-reproduction, work-environment, formal-informal in order to address these challenges.

Julia Soul focussed on reinvigorating a class perspective in the challenges that are facing workers. These are not only the restructuring of work and the commodification of all avenues of social reproduction, but also the environment crisis in all its manifestations, from pollution to the climate crisis, but also the shift to the far-right in political parties and the changing nature of society. There is therefore an imperative to form alliances and solidify unity amongst classes of workers to mount effective responses from workers in different arenas. Here, **education and research** that reveal the many ways in which workers are subordinated to capital is crucial. Focussing on workers' **health and safety** was one way to address these divides and contradictions; a class-perspective on health and safety shifts the focus away from workers' bodies being fit enough to be productive towards workers' wellbeing, quality of life outside of the workplace, and on a life that is lived with dignity and justice. Health and safety extended beyond the realm of production to where workers and their

communities live, from the very concept of there being life outside of the workplace to the quality of life outside of work. This allows for key questions regarding worker's health to be raised, such as in relation to the health system, to pollution and the living environment. Crucially, it can also help fuse together struggles that are mounted against extractivism and the environment by affected communities and those that are by workers on just transition and the retention or extension of available jobs.

Dario Azzellini expanded upon the point of responding from a class perspective with the urgent need for **concrete strategies**. Not a mere recasting of past strategies, but reflecting on the past while building strategies anew. Some of these strategies should focus on the **creation of spaces** where politics can be discussed and built, as spaces where discussions on e.g. religion, the shift to the right, and politics can be debated and countered using a class lens. A second strategy was **organising distinctly but unitedly** to effectively counter the ability of capital to extract surplus value that is higher than firms that are worker-owned. Connected to this is the need to recognise the fragmented nature of global value chains and **organise workers across these chains** by extending action to spatially and temporally distinct territorial struggles. Furthermore, organising was also needed across the spheres of production and reproduction, to link struggles of work with those of health and housing, and globally on the themes of politics and religion. **Research** remains key and the challenge here is to have research centres that are owned by the workers and don't rely on academic institutions to support workers' struggles. This would help the emergence and coalescence of concrete strategies that empower workers to organise, strengthen their networks and strategize in key locations and novel ways.

Joerg Nowak began by addressing the gaps and challenges that globalised production has created. The history of the union movement is one of workers organising locally, then nationally. But with the retreat of the national arena as a locus of organising, there is a lack of clarity on the best strategy for workers. Joerg articulated these challenges as being further compounded by the ecological dimensions that need to be factored in. On the one side, formal workers remain largely detached from environmental issues with their focus being on upskilling and jobs under the just transition. On the other hand, in informal and platform-based sectors, environmentally sensitive transitions might have contradictory outcomes. While self-employed truckers in Brazil are likely to lose work in the transition, app-based urban services like taxis are likely to see a rise in employment opportunities. However, these urban based services often intensify pressures in city environments. Regarding different sectors, there are differences in how the transition affects workers in turn creating a difference between workers fighting for jobs that are immediately needed for survival versus those that are likely to be expanded under the transition. For example, reductions in road-based transport might risk truckers losing their livelihoods, but growth in rail-transport might see an expansion of the railway jobs available. Crucially however, it is important to fight for key demands, since lowered wages, poverty and precarity inhibit the ability of workers to organise, while a structural economic model that increases austerity is ill-equipped to implement an ecological transition.

Workshop Report: Part two – Cross-cutting themes

Drawing together the engagements between and the contributions of the workshop participants, including the speakers, this section places those discussions into cross-cutting themes.

Theme 1: The ‘disguising’ of waged work

In the context of the rise of platform-based and app-based work, there is a growing trend of workers moving from waged work into varied forms of entrepreneurial work. Jeorg Nowak cited the growing entrepreneurship models in Brazil where becoming an entrepreneur has become common, and the framing of the shift from waged work to entrepreneurial work as aspirational. This shift must be analysed by examining what is happening to waged work—most waged work is either exploitative, or under-paid and harsh. Therefore, the shift to being managed by an app by having relatively more control over one’s time does give workers more autonomy. Lucas Cifuentes, PhD student at the University of Manchester, extended this point by stating that what was critical to understand is that entrepreneurship offers a right-wing and capital-centric definition of freedom. What has been lost is the freedom that workers’ struggles previously offered- the material foundations of justice and liberty. Therefore, if freedom of health, freedom of mobility, freedom to choose are important for workers, then alternatives to the rise of these forms of economic activity must be about discerning what is being offered in response to the neoliberal and religious definitions of freedom.

Angela Akorsu saw a similar trend in the growth of app-based work in West Africa, but reiterated that ultimately because this work is exploitative, workers are beginning to question the idea of ‘freedom’, and to look at the exploitative forces behind the app, and organise for better conditions. Dario Azzellini noted that these kinds of work end up individualising the worker; however, it was important to remember that workers have the desire to collectively organise and that it is the *form* of the current union model that stops workers from collectivising. Thus, building new models of collectivising were vital and one agenda to make this happen could be on the fight against commodification. Capital was affecting all workers, disguised or not, through commodification and a response from workers on decommodification is therefore vital.

Jessie Sklair, Lecturer at QMUL, responded to the contributions on entrepreneurship to highlight that capital and state were both complicit in promoting the neoliberal concept of the ‘entrepreneur’ and creating the conditions that forced workers to shift to entrepreneurial forms of work. On the other hand, religious institutions were reinforcing such concepts of freedom and the autonomy of self-governing workers. The challenge therefore was for a class struggle against these forces without using the discourses that ultimately serve capital. Angela extended the neoliberal concept of entrepreneurship to the university, where students were being encouraged to become entrepreneurs, in turn absolving the state of responsibilities towards its citizens. In her experience with platform workers, perhaps there is a developing crisis in the very definition of who a worker is. Isadora Cruxên, Lecturer at QMUL, echoed Jessie’s points on the role of evangelical churches in shaping perceptions of entrepreneurship, where faith was being used as the grammar to cope with, and religion the language to comprehend, unfavourable economic outcomes.

Theme 2: Fragmenting and differentiating workers

In response to the question posed by the chairs on dealing with the fragmentation and differentiation of workers premised on race, gender and religion, Angela Akorsu stated that it was not possible to have a general strategy to address this. For example, differentiation on the lines of gender play out differently in education versus in the job market, and hence dedicated strategies catered to the situation were needed. Rose Omamo added that gender-based differences existed in the labour market in Kenya whereby women were more likely to be stuck in low-skilled jobs or that generally their labour force participation rate was quite low. Matan Kaminer, Lecturer at QMUL, addressing the question of the separation between productive and reproductive spheres, underscored that it was important to recognise how work and community are being articulated by activists, particularly in the Global South. With the end of Fordism, the rupture between work and community had been severed in the North, and that perhaps activists' struggles were important to draw on to bridge this divide since theoretical contributions seemed to be lacking.

Siddharth Chakravarty, PhD student at QMUL, reflecting on his engagement with the fishworkers' union in India on the question of caste and gender, said that strategies required long-term engagement with workers, union leaders and community representatives. Questions of power, and especially the recognition of this by the one wielding structural power, are likely to shift only with long-term critical engagement, personal relationships, and the ability to hold difference in grappling with these difficult conversations, and not through research alone. According to Julia, examining the question of segmentation from a labour process angle was important because this revealed that disguised wage labour is in fact not disguised but very much a part of connected labour processes. Since the nature of segmentation was to cheapen the labour force, thinking in concrete terms of how to organise across differentiation was vital.

Sofia Negri, PhD student at QMUL, contributed insights from research with informal delivery drivers in Argentina. Sofia observed a difference in the vision of union leaders who want work to be formalised versus workers who are a part of the union but want flexibility in their work. Another difference emerges along the lines of gender and migration, whereby it is not always clear who the union is representing and who they are composed of. Often, the unions vote for right-wing governments. Therefore, such unions are likely not responding to the needs and the lived realities of the workers. What is needed is for unions to provide meaning, soul, vision and creativity. Angela agreed that unions were increasingly moving towards reformist, as opposed to transformative demands. Therefore, unions need to embrace new strategies, and we must think deeply about how this can be achieved, keeping in mind that unions are the most resilient and strongest actors to challenge capital.

Theme 3: Locus and strategies of organising

In the final session of the two-day workshop, there were reflections on strategies that can reinvigorate workers' struggles. Rose, on the question of just transition, would like to see national level engagement on the question of just transition to become stronger. Through collective bargaining, the response to the environmental crisis has to come from workers. For Dario, even at the national level, there needs to be a distinction between the Global North and South. In the North,

this requires a rejection of the idea that work is central to living since most of the work that is being done is for the production of unsustainable commodities, and we must embrace the idea of doing less work. Maurizio stressed the need to bring politics to the fore and for a revitalisation of Marxism. On one hand, despite technology, workers were working more, and on the other hand, there were many without work. Unlike Marx's revolutionary working classes, there is a need to contemplate which fragmented class could be the next revolutionary subject. Will Monteith, Lecturer at QMUL, extended Maurizio's points to note that if the 'wretched of the Earth' were the constituents of the revolutionary class, then given the current political economy, there was a need to shift strategies of organising from production to redistribution.

Ed Legon, Lecturer at QMUL, spoke of the importance of memory, picking up on the thread about the past from Dario's comment on building the new while destroying the old. While memories and the past help expand the possibilities of workers' struggles, they can also act as dead weights which bring inertia to struggles and strategies. Dario responded, paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, that power arises from the enslavement of the past, not from the idea of a great future. Since history is not linear and since conceptions of time and its impact vary, it is hard for the real history of capitalism to be comprehended, but it is crucial to regain this history. Finally, Rose reminded the audience of the importance of joy in workers' struggles. When workers struggle, they open the possibilities of winning. And when they win, even in small ways, they are more motivated, happy and joyful.