

*In
Convenience*





Account	renting	09
Atomised	work	09
Collective	organising	11
Flexibility		14
Gig-	economy	15
Hidden	costs	16
Job	insecurity	19
	Migration	24
Minimum	wage	29
Platform	capitalism	31
	Precarity	35
Self-	employment	38
	Strike	41
	Union	41

Having food delivered is a convenience
we take for granted. With a few clicks
it materialises on our doorsteps.

But what are the material conditions
of people delivering it?

How is it like working as a delivery rider?

What struggles do they face?

What are the benefits of the profession?

I talked to eleven food delivery riders in
London about their side of the story,

"Your rider is trying to reach you". I messed up the pin location. I walked towards him and called his name. He recognised my Brazilian accent and told me his real name.

I asked how much he made per order. He thought I was looking for work. I did actually, not because of the money, but for my research. When I told him I couldn't because of my visa, he said I could rent an account like he did.

He gave me his Instagram, offered to help if I needed anything, and took off for his next £3.59 order.

I messaged him telling about my research and asking if we could talk again, but he didn't reply.

I wonder how he saw me. Student, researcher, worker, rich, poor, cool, boring. Definitely not as someone he related to. Even though we came from the same country, it seems we belong to very different places.

I made a glossary with relevant topics around this form of labour,

Account renting

A strategy for those who can't register as a rider in delivery platforms, usually migrants without the right to work in the UK.

Atomised work

The kind of work that tackles small, individual tasks, such as delivery orders, instead of longer, continuous work. As a consequence, workers only get paid for each completed task instead of having a fixed income. They are also isolated from their peers, which makes collective organising more difficult.

and connected my findings with scholarship on the subject.

The ► symbol signals a connection to the content on the following double-page spread.

Collective organising ►

Workers always had to fight for rights like minimum wage, paid vacation and eight-hour workday. Working rights are always on dispute, specially in new and unregulated industries typical of the gig economy. That's why organising, either through a union or small groups, it's essential to ensure a fairer future of work. We have the means to improve working conditions in the gig-economy.



*There is no inherent
reason why such
platforms cannot be
run by, and for, workers
as so called 'platform
cooperatives'*

Trebor Scholz
cited in Mark Graham, Joe Shaw
Towards a fairer gig economy
page 30

Flexibility

The main benefit of the food delivery industry, the promise of working when you want attracts students and people with part-time jobs looking for extra money. For many people food delivery is the only source of income, while others have full-time jobs and do delivery in their spare time, resulting in exhaustively long working hours.

His shifts lasted around eight hours and he didn't work every day. He liked the flexible hours, but was "of course looking for another job". Making his own schedule allowed him to improve his plumbing skills and study English to improve his odds.

After a while his friend came over, talked to him briefly in Arabic (I think), and left. He then asked to see my student ID.

If I was a migrant working as a food delivery rider. I don't know if I would trust a stranger asking questions either.

Gig-economy

An economic system based on freelance jobs instead of longer-term and more stable employment. The name "gig" comes from the kind of work done by musicians and comedians, so its use to describe food delivery is a way to romanticise a precarious reality.

I asked his name, but he didn't want to share.

He worked in accounting. Being a food delivery rider was a side-job he did a couple of times a week for extra income.

He liked Deliveroo's support to riders, better than delivery apps in India.

Hidden costs

Delivery riders must consider a series of costs like fuel, vehicle maintenance, insurance, equipment, taxes and unpaid time between orders. All of these have an impact on their income, often resulting in earnings below the National Minimum Wage.

He was waiting more than half an hour for an order when we started talking. Sometimes this unpaid waiting time can be more than an hour.

And when he does gets an order, it's not always a fair price. He tried talking to someone from Deliveroo about it but there was never a human available. From the algorithm that sets order prices to chat bots, a rider's working routine is entirely dependant on technology that's out of their control.

Riding all day, you're bound to get a ticket. Once he got caught by the police because of his bike's speed capacity and had to pay a £300 fine.

Delivering food is his only job. As the number of riders keeps increasing and the payments keep going down, it's challenging to make ends meet.

I can't blame him for going fast.

"Of course
I'm looking
for another
job"

He waited for about 13 minutes outside Waitrose for a delivery order. When I asked if that was normal, he said he usually doesn't wait that long, and maybe it wasn't such a busy time of the day.

I couldn't tell if he was anxious about it, or just enjoying the (unpaid) break. I didn't ask, I was just a stranger.

Job insecurity

Delivery riders lack basic safety nets like a minimum wage and sick pay, which puts them in a much more precarious condition than employed workers. Furthermore, delivery companies have the right to terminate their accounts at any time with no reasonable explanation, creating an environment of exhaustion and fear of speaking up.

I bumped into him when I was coming back from Sainsbury's. He was standing next to his electric bike, so I thought I'd ask about his work. Turns out he was also from Brazil.

He worked every day, including weekends, from 7am to 11pm, with a lunch break when he also recharged his bike. That's almost 3x as much as a traditional work week.

I had so many questions. How did he manage working that much? Why did he come to London? Was he earning as much as he hoped for? How much did he have to pay the owner of the Deliveroo account? How long would he keep it up? Was it worth it? Did he have a choice?

I looked him up after seeing his name on a news piece about the conditions of Deliveroo riders.

I asked if he would be willing to collaborate, but he had stopped working with deliveries "because of it deteriorating his mental health".

His advice for anyone considering working as a rider was to "do this as a side hustle. As a full time thing, NOT worth doing at all". He also mentioned dangers like "being robbed on the job" and "being stopped regardless".

According to him it can be decent as an occasional activity, but "the risks and the cons outweigh the pros".



Migration ►

Almost every delivery rider I interviewed was a migrant. Many come to the UK from underdeveloped economies looking for a better quality of life but end up working in precarious conditions. The ones with no right to work face additional struggles having to work extenuating hours while avoiding being stopped by the police.

I asked her what she would like to change about her job. She replied, uneasy and in a hurry, that "it's hard working with the apps."

When I asked why, she said it was "hard for the illegals".

I'd heard this small square next to Waterloo station was a meeting point for Brazilian delivery riders, but there was only one rider there, who didn't look Brazilian.

I asked him if he'd be willing to record one of his working days and send me, for instance, screenshots of his orders. That way I could make a zine to be sold for 10% of what he earned that day, like a tip. The profit would be split between him and a union to sponsor new members.

I told him I was doing an MA in Graphic Design. He mentioned he had finished his Master's in HR the previous year and was looking for a job, but it was hard to find a company whiling to sponsor him.

"People don't know what it's like working as delivery rider", he said. He seemed to like my project, so I got his number. I messaged him a few times, but he didn't reply.

**Conversations
From Calais**

Sharing Refugee Stories



Edited by Mathilda Della Torre

*I now have a home, a
family and a life here in
the UK, yet I continue
to be labelled as a
refugee, as a migrant
and, for some, I will
never be a citizen*

Gulwali Passarlay
cited in Mathilda Della Torre
*Conversations from Calais:
sharing refugee stories*
page 45

"It's hard
for the
illegals"

He had just delivered food to my
neighbour.

I asked what he thought about
customers rating riders. He said
riders who do a poor job should
be paid less.

When I asked what he would
change in his job, he complained
about the low pay.

Minimum wage

Even though the National Living Wage in the UK is £12.71 per hour for workers over 21, riders rarely reach that threshold.

I can't blame
him for
going fast

Platform capitalism

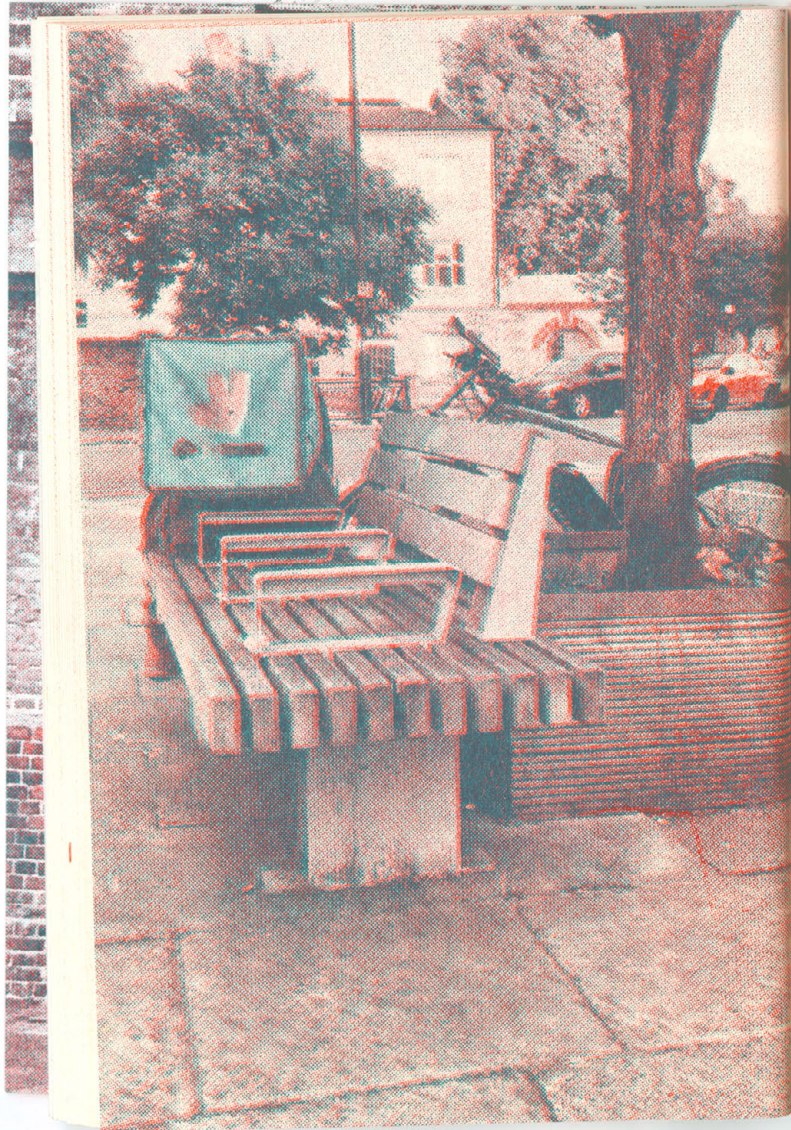
Refers to companies like Google, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, Uber, Airbnb, Amazon and their activities as digital platforms for all kinds of services. A typical strategy employed by these tech giants is to initially operate with lower profit margins—or even at a loss—to attract riders, restaurants, and customers and gradually pay riders less and charge restaurants more. Aided by heavy investments in branding and marketing campaigns, this business model tends to generate substantial returns and market share at the expense of an enormous pool of precarious workers.

When I asked how much he was paid for my order, I think he said £11, but I couldn't understand his English very well.



*Branding, as a
weapon of neoliberal
instrumentality is
complicit in embedding
institutional inequality
and disadvantage*

Jason Grant, Oliver Vodeb
*What is post-branding? How to counter
fundamentalist marketplace semiotics*
page 49



Precarity ▶

Because of low rates offered by apps, workers who rely on deliveries as their only source of income are forced to endure long hours to make a living. Working during high-demand hours may result in better pay, but making the most of this limited time frame can be stressful. Having multiple jobs is another characteristic of precarity. Unpredictable working routine and income is a reality for many people, but delivery riders face additional issues like a higher risk of injuries, which may in turn prevent them from working while not having the protections from traditional employment.



*If we don't nip this in
the bud, tomorrow
we're all going to
wake up and we're
not going to have any
employment rights*

Jason Moyer-Lee
cited in James Bloodworth
Hired: undercover in low-wage Britain
page 257

Self-employment

Delivery riders in the UK are considered self-employed, though they're far from being entrepreneurs who own their own businesses. They have no control over how much they're paid since obscure algorithms set their price, and lack the same employment rights of employed workers.

He did
delivery as
a side job



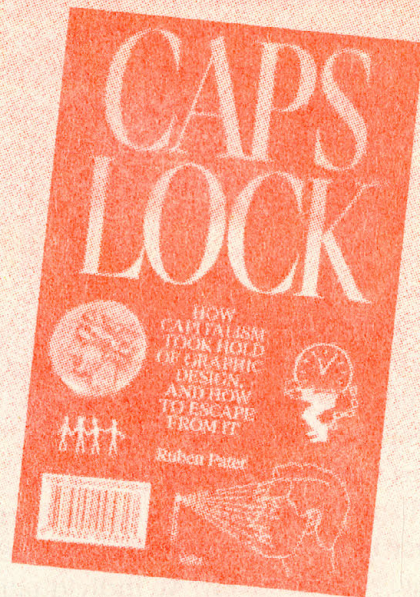
He had
finished his
master's in
HR

Strike

Refusing to work is one of the most effective ways of bargaining for rights. It only works if a significant amount of workers agree to take part, so it is a collective movement. Because it takes time and effort to organise, strikes are usually done by unions with enough resources to support its members during strike action.

Union ▶

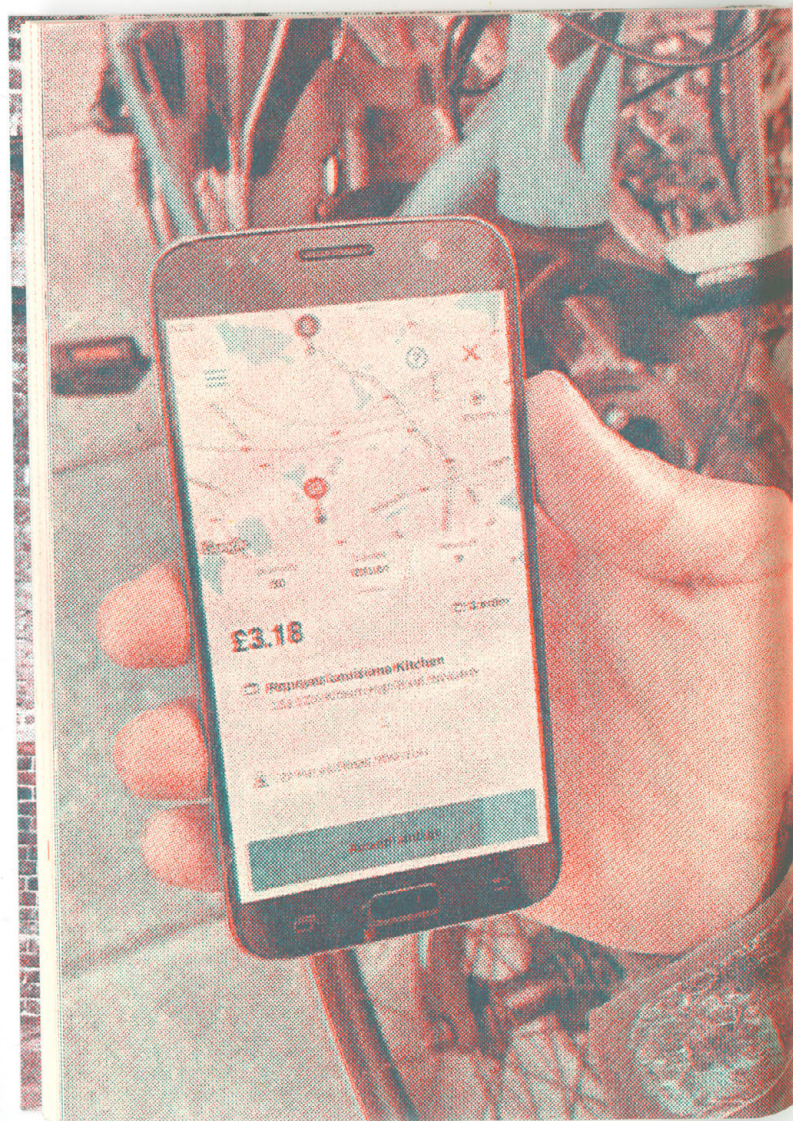
Trade unions are institutions made of workers who unite to protect their common interests, like better wages and working conditions. They also support members during individual legal disputes against companies. Every advance in workers' conditions has been conquered collectively. An individualistic society is only of interest of those who gain from labour exploitation.



*We unlearn care
through capitalism*

Sheila Sampath
cited in Ruben Pater

*Caps lock: how capitalism took hold of
graphic design, and how to escape from it*
page 503



He worked
every day
from 7am
to 11pm

In Convenience is a design project with stories from delivery riders presented outside the branded environment of delivery apps.

Online version at eloureiro.com

Keep in touch @[in.convenience](https://www.instagram.com/in.convenience)



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Pay what you can at eloureiro.com

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A zine by Eduardo Loureiro

