



Transformative Talks for Community Resilience

June 2020

What is the price of convenience?

Supporting delivery and warehouse workers

We live in the age of convenience facilitated by ecommerce and apps. One perspective to acknowledge is that being a consumer of convenience comes at a cost. There is one or several workers behind the package that comes to your door within 24 hours or the food that comes to your door in an hour. How do these workers suffer? What are alternatives to Amazon and other food delivery channels? There is a lot of the exploitation of these third party apps that try to keep rates down and minimize risk for themselves and increase profits for themselves. During this June 2020 Untokening Transformative Talk, we reflected upon the price of convenience.

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF WAREHOUSE WORKERS

Juan shared that warehouse workers are being injured on the job at an alarming rate--even before COVID-19. Warehouse workers are the unseen workers, but incredibly important, in the delivery logistics industry. In a time where Amazon is making record profits, the \$2 pay increase for hazard pay was short-lived. Workers have been demanding greater protections in their work environment to improve safety and prevent the spread of COVID-19. At that time of this conversation, Rina Cummings, amazon warehouse worker and community organizer and advocate with Make the Road NY, on Staten Island was on unpaid leave from her job because she has a preexisting condition. The reason she made the decision to go on unpaid leave is because Amazon was not implementing safety protocols to protect workers from COVID-19. The company was not providing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), they did not create accommodations for adequate physical distancing, they did not stagger lunch breaks to prevent overcrowding, and have not been forthright when there is a COVID-19 outbreak in the workplace. In addition, if a worker has been in close proximity to a person with COVID-19, Amazon made it difficult for the employee to be able to quarantine for two weeks.

This recap was authored by Monique G. Lopez of Pueblo Planning with insight from co-facilitators Rina Cummings, Amazon warehouse worker and community organizer with Make the Road NY, Juan Goris with Make the Road NY, and Helen Ho and Nick Wong with The Biking Public Project and contributing community panelists: Rebecca Reilly, Paola Castaneda, Kirsten, and Natalie Hernandez

"If you are calling people essential, get the essential people what they need. We don't need a crisis or pandemic to call us essential. We don't need a company to describe us as essential. We are human beings and everyone is essential to their family and loved ones. We are essential because we are human beings."

- Rina Cummings

"A lot of people were clapping for the doctors instead of the delivery workers. I'd rather people write a letter or tweet at their elected officials advocating for livable wages, appropriate safety standards, and healthcare than just come outside and clap."

- Helen Ho on the early pandemic trend to clap outside at 7pm for essential workers

Learn more about Make the Road NY at maketheroadny.org
and Biking Public Project at twitter.com/bikingpublic

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DELIVERY WORKERS

Delivery workers are contract workers. Therefore, the bikes they ride or the cars they drive belong to the worker, not the restaurant or grocery store. This illuminates some of the challenges delivery workers face. Due to COVID-19, many delivery workers were left in a vulnerable position in terms of finances and health. For those that wanted to work, many restaurants were closed. There was a lack of personal protective equipment and policies to ensure their safety. For example, delivery workers would wait in front of restaurants with no space to physically distance or the ability to use the restroom to wash their hands. Additionally, during the uprisings in New York City earlier this summer, an 8pm curfew was put into effect. Many essential workers were targeted by the police after 8pm.

10 ACTIONS to Support and Advocate for Delivery and Warehouse Workers

Donate

Give to a whistleblower fund to support warehouse workers who are speaking out and provide financial protection if they lose their job.

Call Out

Juan shared that a boycott would be difficult with Amazon because they are a part of other web-based systems. But when customers speak out, Amazon has been responsive. We collectively need to continue to press Amazon publicly to do what is right and just for the workers, speak out about the risks the workers are taking and support their demands. Use social media to publicly shame Amazon and third-party app providers. Participatory panelist, Rebecca Reilly said, "these platforms have perfected exploitation and need to be called out."

Support Workers' Demands

Paola Castañeda, participatory panelist, shared the immediate impulse to not use the delivery apps or Amazon, but there is this dichotomy consumers face. She has had conversations with delivery workers in Mexico City and asked if she should boycott using the app delivery service and they said no, but to support their demands instead.

Call the Restaurant

Rather than a third-party app, call the restaurant directly, pay over the phone and provide your delivery worker with a cash tip. Often, on the apps, there is a delivery charge but the entire fee doesn't go to the delivery worker and most do not add more tips. The only guaranteed way to ensure delivery workers get the money is to literally put it in their hands.

Shop Locally

Rina shared different strategies to make relying less on Amazon possible for those who are able. "There are plenty of mom-and-pop businesses that can deliver your medication, food, goods. Research and seek out those businesses and purchase directly from them. Go directly to manufacturers' websites and buy directly."

Neighborhood Scale Delivery

Participatory panelist, Kristen Wilkens, shared how folks in Capetown are exploring new hyperlocal models of connecting businesses in a bikeable radius and to bike couriers that can make their deliveries to serve as a model to decentralize and democratize the delivery economy. Additionally, exploring and implementing worker cooperatives could allow the people who do the work to own the work.

Increase Pay

Right now we should be tipping in person and not using the apps to tip. However, we should be working to increase wages rather than utilizing tips as a way to pay these workers.

Update Policies

Rina stated what is needed is more government oversight to protect workers. Many of the factory laws that protected people in the 1920s are no longer adequate to protect warehouse workers today. The law has not caught up to technology, working conditions, and the logistic operations. Nick added a call for the reformation of the gig economy and for laws to reflect the current situation of new technologies and third party exploitation of workers.

Defund the Police

The discrimination delivery workers face is primarily from police officers. Helen stated, "we need to get police to stop harassing people of color on the street" and went on to say one way to do that is to "defund the police."

Vote your Values

Helen emphasized knowing who your elected officials are and to connect with them. "If your elected officials don't work for you, get new ones!"