
Technology and worker power



Tuesday, February 23, 2021

2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. EST

Agenda

Virtual event

Technology has always been an integral part of the tools people use at their jobs and to create solidarity and exercise their voices at work. Change is inevitable, but the form it takes is not. At issue are how workplaces implement new technologies and the impact these technologies have on workers' lives. How these technological changes are implemented, in turn, depends on the underlying economic and legal structures, as well as the extent to which workers are empowered to be full and active partners in technological adoption and integration.

The Washington Center for Equitable Growth's "A future for all workers: Technology and worker power" virtual event will feature researchers and advocates discussing how technology is used to amplify or stifle worker voice, how workers bargain over the use of data and technology, and how policy can improve outcomes in the future of work.

Keynote

- **Mary Kay Henry**, International President, Service Employees International Union
- Moderator: **Kate Bahn**, Director of Labor Market Policy, Washington Center for Equitable Growth

Panel 1: Using technology for worker voice

Technology offers new opportunities for workers to engage with each other and collectively exercise their voices at work. This panel will review how workers successfully use the tools of technology to engage with each other and with their employers to increase worker power, and what new tools and policy supports are needed to continue to build worker power in a new economy.

Panelists

- **Dawn Gearhart**, Gig Economy Organizing Director, National Domestic Workers Alliance
- **Steve Viscelli**, Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania
- **Meredith Whittaker**, Minderoo Research Professor at New York University and Co-founder and Faculty Director of the AI Now Institute at NYU
- Moderator: **Sam Harnett**, KQED Silicon Valley Reporter

Panel 2: Bargaining over technology

Throughout history, technological adoption within workplaces has changed the nature of people's jobs. One critical aspect of worker power is being able to bargain over the processes of implementing and using new technologies, so that both workers and businesses can thrive in a productive economy. This panel will explore worker advocacy around new technologies in the workplace, and what legislation and protections are needed for workers to have a say over how and when new technologies become part of their jobs.

Panelists

- **Abdirahman Muse**, Executive Director, Awood Center
- **Brishen Rogers**, Associate Professor of Law, Temple University
- **William Spriggs**, Chief Economist, AFL-CIO, and Professor of Economics, Howard University
- **Julia Ticona**, Assistant Professor, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania
- Moderator: **Sarah Jaffe**, Type Media Center Fellow

Participant Bios

Introduction

Kate Bahn, *Director of Labor Market Policy, Washington Center for Equitable Growth*
Twitter: @LipstickEcon

Kate Bahn is the director of labor market policy and an economist at the Washington Center for Equitable Growth. Her areas of research include gender, race, and ethnicity in the labor market, care work, and monopsonistic labor markets. Previously, she was an economist at the Center for

American Progress. Bahn also serves as the executive vice president and secretary for the International Association for Feminist Economics. Bahn received her Ph.D. in economics from the New School for Social Research and her B.A. from Hampshire College.

Keynote

Mary Kay Henry, *International President, Service Employees International Union*

Twitter: @MaryKayHenry

Mary Kay Henry is the international president of the 2-million-member Service Employees International Union. Her leadership is rooted in a deep-seated belief that when Black, Brown, Asian Pacific Islander, and White working people join together, we can make the impossible possible. Under her leadership, SEIU members have won major victories to improve the jobs of healthcare, property services, and public-sector workers across the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico. Henry's decision to back the courageous fast-food workers and other service and care workers in the historic "Fight for \$15 and a Union" movement has helped 24 million working Americans win wage increases. In 2010, Henry became the first woman elected to lead the SEIU. Since then, *Fast Company* magazine named her one of the 100 most creative leaders in the economy, *Politico* magazine named her one of the top 50 visionaries reshaping American politics, and in 2019, the governor of California tapped her to co-chair the state's Future of Work Commission.

Panel 1: Using technology for worker voice

Dawn Gearhart, *Gig Economy Organizing Director, National Domestic Workers Alliance*

Twitter: @domesticworkers

Dawn Gearhart has spent nearly 10 years organizing, representing, and advocating for workers in the gig economy. She works directly with platform workers, allies, and organizers to address pressing issues regarding automation and its impact on work. Her current role at NDWA focuses on strategic thinking regarding the future of work and its impacts. Previously, as lead organizer for the App Based Driver's and Western Washington Taxicab Associations, she was the first to organize Uber and other drivers who passed innovative labor policies. The precedent-setting legislation offered a legal pathway for workers in a world where companies see value in avoiding traditional employment relationships. Gearhart is now based in Norway, where she has been conducting research to inform global governments and decision-makers about issues and opportunities facing workers in the new economy.

Steve Viscelli, *Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania*

Twitter: @PennSAS

Steve Viscelli is an economic sociologist who studies work, labor markets, automation, and public policy. He is currently a faculty fellow at the Kleinman Center for Energy Policy and a lecturer in the Department

of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. His first book, *The Big Rig: Trucking and the Decline of the American Dream*, explains how deregulation of trucking and the rise of independent contracting turned trucking from one of the best blue-collar jobs in the United States into one of the toughest. His current research looks at the impact of self-driving trucks on truckers and e-commerce on last-mile delivery workers. In addition to his academic research, Viscelli works with a range of public and private stakeholders to make the trucking industry more efficient, safer, and a better place to work.

Meredith Whittaker, *Minderoo Research Professor at New York University and Co-founder and Faculty Director of the AI Now Institute at NYU*

Twitter: @mer__edith

Meredith Whittaker is the Minderoo research professor at New York University, and the founder of Google's Open Research group and co-founder of the AI Now Institute. Her research and advocacy focus on the social implications of artificial intelligence and the tech industry responsible for it, with a particular emphasis on power and the political economy driving the commercialization of computational technology. Prior to NYU, she worked at Google for more than a decade, where she led product and engineering teams, founded Google's Open Research Group, and co-founded M-Lab, a globally distributed network measurement platform that now provides the world's largest source of open data on internet performance. As a longtime tech worker, she also helped lead labor organizing at Google. She was one of the core organizers pushing back against Google's military contracts, the company's insufficient response to concerns about AI and its harms, and was a central organizer of the Google Walkout.

Sam Harnett (Moderator), *KQED Silicon Valley Reporter*

Twitter: @SamWHarnett

Sam Harnett is a reporter at KQED who covers labor, capital, and Silicon Valley corporations. Last fall, he released "[How We Got Here](#)," a 3-hour radio documentary about how shareholder capitalism has undermined American workers. He is the co-creator of "[The World According to Sound](#)," an audio series and streaming surround-sound experience. Before coming to KQED, Harnett worked as an independent reporter who contributed regularly to The California Report, Marketplace, The World, and NPR.

Panel 2: Bargaining over technology

Abdirahman Muse, *Executive Director, Awood Center*

Twitter: @AwoodMpls

Abdi Muse is the executive director of Awood Center in Minneapolis, a community organization focused on advocating for and educating Minnesota's growing East African communities about their labor rights. He previously served Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges as a senior policy aide on housing, neighborhoods, and as a liaison to the Somali community. He has been an organizer for the Service Employees International Union, focused on improving employment conditions for workers in the home care and healthcare facility field.

Brishen Rogers, *Associate Professor of Law, Temple University*

Twitter: @BrishenRogers

Brishen Rogers is an associate professor of law at Temple University Beasley School of Law. He teaches labor law, employment law, employment discrimination, and torts. His current research explores the relationship between labor and employment law, workplace technological development, and economic and social equality. He is writing a book on those questions, titled *Data and Democracy at Work*, under contract with The MIT Press. In addition to his law review publications, he has recently written for *The New York Times*, *Boston Review*, *The Washington Post's* Outlook section, LPEBlog, and Onlabor.org. Rogers received his J.D., cum laude, from Harvard Law School and his B.A., with high distinction, from the University of Virginia.

William Spriggs, *Chief Economist, AFL-CIO, and Professor of Economics, Howard University*

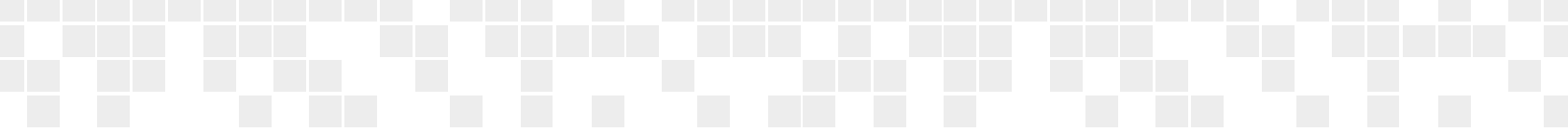
Twitter: @WSpriggs

William Spriggs is a professor in, and former chair of, the Department of Economics at Howard University and serves as chief economist to the AFL-CIO. In his role with the AFL-CIO, he chairs the Economic Policy Working Group for the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and serves on the board of the National Bureau of Economic Research. He is currently on the Advisory Board to the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank Opportunity and Inclusive Growth Institute. From 2009 to 2012, he served as assistant secretary for the Office of Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor. Spriggs has played a leading role in economic policy development, serving as executive director for the Institute for Opportunity and Equality of the National Urban League, with various federal agencies, and the Democratic staff of the Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress. He graduated from Williams College, and holds a doctorate in economics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Julia Ticona, *Assistant Professor, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania*

Twitter: @JuliaTicona1

Julia Ticona is an assistant professor at the Annenberg School for Communication, where her research investigates the ways that digital communication technologies shape the meaning and dignity of precarious work. She uses qualitative methods to examine the role of mobile phones, algorithmic labor platforms, and data-intensive management systems in the construction of identity and inequality for low-wage workers. She also collaborated on an amicus brief on behalf of Data & Society for *Carpenter vs. U.S.* before the U.S. Supreme Court. Her book, about the “digital hustles” of high and low-status freelancers in the gig economy, is under contract with Oxford University Press. Previously, she was a postdoctoral scholar at the Data & Society Research Institute and is now a Faculty Affiliate. She is also an Associate Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. She received her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Virginia, where she was a member of the Society of Fellows, and her B.A. from Wellesley College. You can find her work in *New Media & Society*, *Information, Communication, and Society*, as well as *Wired*, *FastCompany*, and *Slate*.



Sarah Jaffe (Moderator), *Type Media Center Fellow*

Twitter: @sarahljaffe

Sarah Jaffe is the author of *Work Won't Love You Back: How Devotion to Our Jobs Keeps Us Exploited, Exhausted and Alone* and *Necessary Trouble: Americans in Revolt*, both from Bold Type Books. She is a Type Media Center reporting fellow and an independent journalist covering the politics of power, from the workplace to the streets. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, *The New Republic*, *The Atlantic*, and many other publications. She is the co-host, with Michelle Chen, of *Dissent* magazine's *Belabored* podcast, as well as a columnist at *The Progressive* and *New Labor Forum*. Jaffe has a master's degree in journalism from Temple University in Philadelphia and a bachelor's degree in English from Loyola University New Orleans.