Policy Implications of Virtual Work: Organizing, Protecting and Regulating Labor”

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Vassil Kirov,
Associate Professor, Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Associate Researcher, ETUI
Objective

- To present shortly the contributions of the part of the book on “Organizing, Protecting and Regulating Labor”
The need to go “down” and explore the specificities of the sector/occupation

- Job destructions/job creations and/or transforming existing jobs
- Work carried online/work carried offline
- The ‘good’ or ‘bad’ platforms (Uber vs Bzzt)
- The variety of jobs – “the best workplaces” at the tech giants versus the fragmented tasks of turkers and micro-tasker
Controversial outcomes of digitalization in terms of QoW

- Opportunities for employment and income generation for some categories (such as students, mothers with small children and handicapped people) because of its flexible character.
- Further fragmentation of work for the majority of employees and self-employed involved in platforms (very insecure working conditions, lacks of guarantees for income and social security, work life balance problems, lack of voice and skills development and so on).
Workers, Contradictions and Digital Commodity Chains: Organizing with Content Creators in Canada (Wirsig and Compton, 2017)

• The challenges faced by the Canadian Media Guild (CMG) in organizing factual/non-fiction TV production workers, freelance workers and so-called YouTubers;
• The digitalization as a factor for the restructuring of commodity chain in the media industry and change of the labour process;
• Diversity of cases – but difficulty to obtain full-time employment in their chosen professions
The example of youtubers

- “YouTubers consider themselves professional, ‘independent’ creators even if they are dependent on the platform, its algorithms and its one-sided user agreement to make money without having any control over, or even disclosure about how these function”.

- Recently a group of Canadian online content producers founded the Independent Web Content Creators (IWCC) (not a union, the IWCC is focused on events, education, lobbying and connecting members to resources).

- The organization could also potentially provide an important opportunity to develop positions on improving the situation for independent creators. CMG organizers and IWCC in discussion how to support each other in their respective organizing work.
Organizing workers in media?

- Where - conditions of work are tightly controlled by online platforms such as YouTube, Uber, Lyft and Mechanical Turk.

- Who – not understood as work in the traditional sense, neither those creators are ‘associated’ with workers..., however they are part of the ‘liquid’ labor force (Huws 2016) available to fill the just-in-time and all-the-time content needs of an industry in transformation.

- How – “Media unions need to find a way to embrace these contradictory identities and create a sense of common purpose and inter-dependency among the people who produce for the media without truly controlling the platforms and organizations that profit from their work”

- By whom – unions together with specific organisations?
The digitalization of public services (Kirov, 2017)

- Digitalization of public services is explored mainly from the point of view of public sector reforms and benefits for governments and users, while its labor and employment aspects are clearly neglected (Kirov, 2017).
- Different resistances to digitalisation leading to deskilling and change of work object and shift in the work object — “from working with human beings to working with electronic information” (Nygren, 2012).
- Coming at the trade union agenda, but need to ‘translate’ the general debate into more evidence-based and detailed discussion…
The digitalization of public services - 2

- Digital technology at the workplace must service to empower and support workers, through greater autonomy and work flexibility and improved quality of public services delivery (CEMR and EPSU)...

- Need for applied research and stakeholders to reveal the potential disadvantages of digitalization (24/27 and 7/7, core/periphery..., deskilling/skilling, control and surveillance, spatial restructuring, new HR indicators,...)
The Legal Protection of Crowdworkers (Prassl and Risak, 2017)

- Employment law struggles with the crowdsourcing of labor given the involvement of an intermediary or platform in addition to the crowdworkers and crowdsourcers.
- The two authors ‘explore a series of options to ensure that crowdwork remains or is brought back into the scope of employment and labor law’.
- the new ‘solo entrepreneurs’ and freelancers found doing platform work are very different from the traditional self-employed liberal professions.
- Exploring the five main functions of employer and how they are ‘divided’ in this multilateral relation.
- Greatest promise in the creation of a special legislative act dealing with the issues involved with crowdwork as was done for temporary agency work.
Challenges

- For organized labor, there is a real challenge to mobilize and protect the rights of self-employed or freelance labor to free assembly and collective bargaining.

- For labor law, determining the responsibilities of the various actors in the digital space (employers, intermediaries, workers, customers) is on the agenda. Setting employment contracts and (re)defining worker status are both challenges for legal systems and a prerequisite for ensuring flexibility on the one side and a protection of workers on the other.

- Regulations: levels (EU, national…) and levers…