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Revolution or Reform? Union-Worker Cooperative Relations in the United States and Korea

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Abstract
This paper examines to what extent union-cooperative partnerships might revitalize labor movements and identifies important factors shaping the nature of union-cooperative partnerships. The premise is that the level of strong or weak class consciousness is an important factor in shaping the nature of union-cooperative relations. Using a case study of Denver's immigrant taxi union cooperative in the United States and a bus drivers' union cooperative in South Korea, the paper argues that union-coop partnerships built with strong class-conscious organizing (as in Korea) bring more transformational energy to the labor movement than union-coop partnerships in the "business unionism" model, as in the United States.

Keywords
union cooperatives, labor unions, worker cooperatives, class consciousness

Introduction

Though the post-1970s era of global neoliberalism has seen a withering of labor power across the world, recent years have witnessed a florescence of union-cooperative or union-coop partnerships, including renewed thinking about how unions can use their resources to build the alternative kind of economy many worker coops support, and of how coop owners can think politically and in solidarity with union workers in a struggle to humanize the economic system. Both unions and worker cooperatives believe in "economic democracy, wealth sharing and putting people before profits," and these

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shared values are increasingly moving unions and cooperatives "from indifference to common ground" (Davidson 2011).

However, the growth of partnerships between unions and worker cooperatives is not necessarily associated with new forms of progressive labor action, nor may it be assumed that the power and scope of labor movements will necessarily grow through such alliances. Rather, an examination of how these collaborations are unfolding on the ground shows that union-coop alliances are not necessarily accommodating to the existing capitalist system, nor are they necessarily transformational. Both unions and worker coops face important dilemmas in balancing their practical work as "simply business" against broader aspirations to wage a "battle for socialism" (Buber 1958, 70, cited in Prychitko 1989, 3). When the two organizations come together, these dilemmas are not always resolved in a way that advances progressive alternatives to capitalism. Rather, union-coop collaborations can adopt a model of accommodational business unionism, just as they can adopt a model of labor militancy.

This paper examines the extent to which union-cooperative partnerships might revitalize local labor movements, and some of the important factors involved in shaping the nature of union-cooperative partnerships. The premise is that the level of strong or weak class consciousness among the labor activists who build these partnerships is an important factor in shaping the nature of the union-cooperative relations that emerge. Union-coop partnerships built with a low level of class consciousness are quite limited in their potential to revitalize local labor movements, whereas partnerships featuring significant class-conscious organizing bring more transformational energy to the labor movement. To demonstrate the role of class consciousness in a union cooperative, the paper provides a case study of emerging union-cooperative collaborations in two countries: the United States and Korea. In the United States, Denver's immigrant taxi union cooperatives are allying with a local union in a way that reflects traditional business unionism with its significant limitations as a labor empowerment strategy, whereas a unionized bus driver cooperative in Korea is following a path of transformational labor militancy.

Antagonism: Labor Unions and Worker Cooperatives

New labor partnerships suggest a future of enhanced labor power, but we must remain attuned to the fact that labor movements, old or new, constantly face the difficult choices described by America's Progressive Labor Party in 1964: "Two paths are open to the workers of any given country. One is the path of resolute class struggle; the other is the path of accommodation, collaboration."[1] A great deal of labor history is shaped by the different trajectories that result from labor organizations choosing different paths in navigating the choices between "class struggle" and "accommodation, collaboration." In assessing the likely consequences of newly emerging partnerships between unions and coops in today's labor movement, therefore, we must pay attention to the way these movements unfold on the ground, and how they answer that eternal question of "reform or revolution," "class struggle or accommodation."

Relations between labor unions and worker cooperatives have always been shaped by differing ontologies regarding capital and labor relations, with associated differences regarding the fundamental question of "class struggle or accommodation." The choice between "class struggle" and "accommodation" with capitalism is deeply related to notions of "class" itself. E.P. Thomson, in his classic *Making of the English Working Class* (1966), argues that "class" is something that happens when people "as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared) feel *and articulate* the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against others whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs" (cited in Isaac, Harrison, and Lipold 2008, 11, emphasis added).

But the ways by which the concept of a shared class identity is *articulated* among workers as a result of common experience and shared interests are obscure. For example, it is difficult to define the relationships between capital and labor (inherently exploitive? potentially collaborative?). It is not always self-evident to a worker that he or she shares an identity with coworkers, or that this identity might be naturally "against others [i.e., capitalists] whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs." Both unions and worker-owned cooperatives consistently face this difficult task of helping workers define the relationship between labor and capital, and their own class position, and both institutions have offered radical and accommodating responses to this enduring task.

Regarding labor unions, there have long been differing perspectives on how unions should respond to capital. Although radical labor advocates assume an inevitably adversarial relationship between labor and capital, more accommodationist perspectives have emphasized the need for unions to cooperate with capital in order to survive in a capitalist reality, and to forge pragmatic partnerships that advance the interests of both capital and labor in any given workplace. From the more radical perspective, Marx argued that trade unions are "important as an organized means to promote the abolition of the very system of wage labour" (Dridzo 1935, 17).

Although some argue that adversarial relations between unions and employers are necessary to strengthen labor movements (Kelly 1998), many have argued against these adversarial assumptions. For instance, Streech (1992) argues that "unions should move from a conflict-oriented, adversarial, distributionist position to a productive, cooperationist position" (cited in Wheeler 2002, 180). Many scholars have similarly argued that "the willingness of unions and their members to behave 'moderately' provides a way to survive in capitalism," and some suggest that "offering concessions to the employer" is "a part of a new social partnership" based on decreased antagonism between labor and capital (Kelly 1998, 4).

The stances of worker cooperatives concerning capital-labor relations have been similarly Janus-faced. While a radical view of worker cooperatives sees these institutions as a transformational strategy through which labor absorbs capital, pursues the elimination of the wage system and seeks control of the workplace by labor, even across the broader economy, a more reformist view on capital-labor relations focuses on worker cooperatives as simply a tool to foster worker ownership of company shares, as a tool to advance their own economic self-interest.

It is certainly true that worker coops often must consider the path of an efficient, business-like approach, since in the end, worker cooperatives are economic organizations that need to survive in the capitalist system and, therefore, must operate like any other business, seeking to build profits through efficient business practices. As "a product of capitalist society," the goal of the cooperative is to "improve the income of members as part of the private enterprise system" (Abrahamsen 1976, 11; Thornley 1981, 173). This reality means that worker cooperatives often face a danger of degeneration, in terms of any broader goals of social transformation, in that they face pressure to "adopt the same organizational forms and priorities as capitalist businesses in order to survive" (Cornforth 1995, 488).

However, worker cooperatives also have transformational potential because of their concerns for a sustainable and equitable community, and their commitment to workplace democracy as part of a radical critique of capitalism (Clay 2013; Engler 2010; Malleson 2014; Restakis 2010). From this perspective, economic democracy through a worker cooperative becomes one way to practice political democracy and build a "broader social democracy" (Bernard 2008-2009; Restakis 2010).

Though many coops naturally have such broader social and political goals, worker coops often find it difficult to build new forms of competitive businesses while also staying connected to broader political goals. In their focus on operating a successful business, "worker cooperatives became disassociated from the labor movement" (Hochner et al. 1988, 16). It is often challenging for cooperatives to be efficient economic entities, and provide "a high living standard for their members," while also participating in progressive campaigns and advancing "egalitarian and participatory values" across their community (Lawrence 2001, 8).

Both unions and worker cooperatives face these enduring dilemmas of accommodation or transformation. Although some have argued that affiliation with labor unions naturally offers worker cooperatives the opportunity to be more politically engaged through "action in solidarity on workers' rights and opportunities in the community and broader economic arena" (Hoyer 2015; Wright 2010), the way by which actual worker coop-union collaborations unfold on the ground can be quite accommodationist (according to principles of business unionism) or potentially transformational (according to principles of labor militancy), depending on the local political and economic context.

Business Unionism in the U.S. Labor Movement

American labor unions have functioned according to the principle of accommodationist business unionism for most of the twentieth century. The notion of revolutionary unionism never gained much traction in America, fueling a cottage industry of scholarship examining "why is there no socialism in the United States?" In his classic answer, Louis Hartz (1955) pointed to an individualistic, "liberal tradition" in America that undermines notions of class solidarity among workers, and Salvatore (1984) found that America's open and pluralistic political system has led to the lack of a class-conscious, oppositional identity among workers—a kind of unique "Americanism" identified as far back as Tocqueville. Class conflict has often occurred in American

history, Salvatore (1984) notes, "but only rarely did that experience produce a conscious and sustained self-image of working people as a class standing in opposition to other classes in society" (29). This "liberal" American political culture has shaped a tradition of business unionism, "which has undermined the notions of class solidarity among workers, and also has been associated with the idea of a 'belief' in the harmony of interests of capital and labor" (Greenstone 1969, 28).

In this tradition of business unionism, unions are to confine to work within the framework of a collective bargaining agreement to build mutually beneficial relations between management and labor. According to Aronowitz (2014), collective bargaining was one of the main reasons why the U.S. labor movement evolved to a "bureaucratic business unionism" in which labor unions "gave up contesting control over the labor process and recognized capital's 'right to manage' after the war" (Post 2015). By giving up on "control over the introduction of technology, and the resulting speed-up and deskilling of work, labor unions did justify a trade-off for higher wages and employment-based social benefits" (Post 2015).

This business unionism philosophy especially escalated among American union leaders when the successes of the New Deal persuaded many that capitalism could work for both capital and labor. As a response to the Great Depression, Roosevelt built New Deal assistance programs to provide the poor with good wages, public assistance, and a variety of public goods like health care and housing. Preceding radical concepts of a self-sufficient alliance of unions and cooperatives replacing the entire capitalist system, advanced by such groups as the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the decades before the New Deal, evaporated in the face of the growing welfare state, which resulted in less union leader interest in worker cooperatives (Leikin 1999; Rothschild 2009). In these years, the AFL turned away from campaigns to replace capitalism with cooperativism and, instead, sought to be an institution of management-labor collaboration.

Although the Wagner Act of 1935 guaranteed the right of labor unions to organize workers without employers' intervention, it also resulted in weakening the power of a labor union because labor unions had to rely on "the National Labor Relations Act framework for union recognition" (Post 2015). Also, the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 prevented the secondary boycott, eliminating the power of industrial scaled, class-based worker mobilization even further. In the late 1940s and 1950s, McCarthy's witch hunts to eradicate Communists also played a role in the massive purge of union activists, resulting in the dismantling of radicalism among the CIO. As a result, grassroots radicals with visions of transformed capitalism became scarce in the U.S. labor movement, while an alternative strategy of business unionism came to rely on top-down union hierarchies.

An Emerging Alternative? The Modern U.S. Worker Cooperative Movement

While the power of labor unions to organize workers has continued to shrink due to global restructuring, the worker cooperative movement in the United States is small but it is growing. There are now an estimated 300 to 400 worker cooperatives that

have 2,500 to 3,500 worker owners in the United States (Abel 2014). The trend of economic informalization has been coupled with expanding worker-owned cooperatives, especially within the service sector (i.e., cleaning, food catering, landscaping, taxi driving), and with an especially notable growth of immigrant worker-owned cooperatives (Ji and Robinson 2012). It is estimated that 35 percent of worker cooperatives are in the service sector, and 23 percent of worker cooperatives are in retail sectors (Abel 2014, 7).

The growth of worker-owned cooperatives is paralleled by the rising support of many urban leaders. Spearheaded by the success of the "Evergreen Initiative" in 2009, a well-funded plan to build a network of worker cooperatives in Cleveland, many cities such as Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, New York, Madison, Jackson (MI), Richmond, and Reading (PA) have been supporting worker cooperative initiatives (Alperovitz, Williamson, and Howard 2010; Flanders 2014; Johnsen 2010; Scher 2014).

Labor unions have also stepped up to support worker-owned cooperatives, as seen most dramatically in the case of the United Steel Workers' initiating a partnership with Mondragon in 2009. Similarly, the Cincinnati Union Cooperative Initiative (CUCI) was launched in 2012 with a goal to expand union collaboration with worker cooperatives. Pittsburgh's Operating Engineers, Local 66, has recently initiated the Clean and Green Laundry Cooperative project (Dean 2013). The United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) was also critical in taking over a failing window manufacturing company (Republic Windows) in Chicago to turn it into a worker cooperative in 2013. All these examples demonstrate an effort to renew collaboration between unions and worker cooperatives as a way to strengthen working class power—but understanding the actual nature of these emerging partnerships requires a case-study examination.

Business Unionism among Denver's Immigrant Taxi Workers: A Case Study

Greenberg (1986, 119) once described the radical potential of a worker cooperative as follows:

> Workplace democracy encourages participation in other social institutions outside of the workplace; helps create citizens who are endowed with a sense of their own political efficacy; increases participation in normal political life; and creates a sense of community and cooperator as well as a commitment to the public interests.

However, these potentially far-reaching effects of worker cooperativism do not occur naturally. Transformational practices emerging from a workers cooperative do not occur without "workers committed to radical ideology" (Wright 2014, 55)—a commitment that can be supported or undermined by collaboration with union partners. The case of Denver's recent union-coop taxi collaboration is a case where the radical potential of union-coop alliance is being overtaken by the spirit of business unionism.

Taxi Workers' Challenging Economic Situation

Taxi driving is often regarded as a "poor man's gateway to mainstream America" (Dao 1992), but the reality is that drivers "have to pay for the right to work in that they need access to a taxi medallion to do their job" (Dhar 2013). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), the annual income for a taxi driver is $22,820, with no benefits or insurance provided by most taxi companies (Lazo 2014), and a study of Chicago's taxi workers by Robert Bruno (2009) argued that Chicago taxi drivers, on average, make the net annual income of $12,320.95, and an hourly wage of $4.38 an hour (Bruno 2009, 26). These low incomes associated with taxi work have to do with the classification of workers as independent contractors. While the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act guarantees a minimum wage, regulated hours, and overtime pay for employees in most industries, "independent contractors" are excluded from those guarantees. Thus, independent contractors lack access to minimum wage as well as "employer provided health insurance, paid vacation and sick days, pensions and other benefits" (Milkman and Ott 2014, 6). Another difficulty is that the number of taxi licenses (often called "medallions") is limited by law, so as not to introduce destructive competition into the taxi business (Inamdar 2013). The scarce and expensive nature of these medallions and the limited number of taxi companies that control them mean that individual taxi drivers are at a disadvantage in negotiating fair payments from the company (Bruno 2009).

Other challenges are associated with the rise of ride-sharing services such as Uber, which has resulted in "a lesser degree of scrutiny and oversight than that of the taxi industry" (McBride 2014). As Uber and similar companies are classified as "Transportation Network Companies" made up of independent contractors—and not as individually owned businesses with employees—these companies can avoid complying with state regulations, thus "shifting risk from corporations to workers, weakening labor protections and driving down wages" (Asher-Schapiro 2014). Due to this range of challenges, taxi workers are subject to exploitation by companies with low wages, few benefits, and little protection.

Denver's Emerging Taxi Worker Union-Cooperative Partnerships

Denver taxi drivers face the normal range of economic challenges. Denver taxi workers, as independent contractors, are subject to high monthly leasing fees to private companies, ranging from $2,000 to $3,200. For instance, Denver workers owe the Metro Taxi company $127 every day for vehicle leasing, even when a worker is too sick to drive. "The moment we ignite our car in the morning, we owe the company money," explains "Juan."[2] Many companies have fired workers on the spot for any attempts to protest the company's fees, arguing that "Mohammad comes, Mohammad goes."[3] Another worker stated that "I worked 15 hours a day for three days but I did not make a penny for these three days because I had to pay all to the company."[4]

As a response to such conditions, the effort to organize a taxi cooperative within a labor union came from a previous Communication Workers of America (CWA) 7777

president, Duncan Harrington. Duncan Harrington did not drive as he did not have a drivers' license, and, thus, he relied on taxies for his work. While using a taxi as his transportation, Harrington discovered the plight of taxi workers and decided to help workers organize a taxi association, Pro Taxi, in 2005, which became instrumental in creating Denver's first union cooperative, affiliated with CWA 7777, Union Taxi. CWA 7777 was successful in political lobbying to break the monopoly taxi business in Denver, and the Union Taxi cooperative received 262 licenses to run a new taxi company in 2009. Union Taxi worker owners also became CWA 7777 members in 2009, renting CWA 7777 space until they purchased their own building in 2014.

A second Denver taxi cooperative, Green Taxi, with over 1,000 taxi drivers, was formed in October 2014 with a goal to replicate the success of Union Taxi. Immigrant taxi workers viewed labor unions positively, as a worker noted that "I wanted a union because the labor union will give us more power" (Ji 2014). The CWA 7777 was successful in lobbying and passing legislation (HB1316) in February 2015, and Green Taxi has "$1.3 million in cash and has 275 cabs, all driver-owned, ready to roll" as of today (Blake 2016). The final decision is to be made by the Colorado Public Utilities Commission on whether to grant licenses to Green Taxi in the near future.

Business Unionism: Individual Owners, Not Collective Workers

Though some have celebrated alliances of unions and coops as a new strategy of labor empowerment, the case of Denver taxi cooperatives shows unionized coop members seeking little more than individual economic benefit through their new coop—there is little evidence of broader transformational possibilities in the strategies so far adopted by Denver taxi coops and their union partners. For example, when interviewed by this author about their notions of class solidarity, 100 percent of sixty-nine Denver taxi cooperative members regarded themselves as individual business owners and not as collective worker owners. As a matter of fact, individual taxi drivers can transfer their ownership to families and relatives, without requiring any kind of training in cooperative principles or allowing for broader group involvement in reviewing such transfers. This author interviewed several drivers who paid to lease their cooperative taxi license from another coop member, and found that none of those who leased their cooperative license knew what a worker cooperative was or how it was meant to function. With a strong sentiment of individualistic ownership, 59 percent of cooperative members (forty-one members) interviewed by this author claimed that they did not think of themselves in class terms, and the majority of workers interviewed agreed with one worker's claim that "I do not think of myself in working class terms. I am just an individual owner."[5]

This notion of low-income workers transcending their situation through individualistic business ownership corresponds to a long-enduring pattern wherein American workers seek to transcend class position through individual effort, and not by mobilizing as self-conscious members of a "working class," confronting the inequities of capitalism (Salvatore 1984). In this way, worker ownership can be seen as a mechanism for attaining middle-class identity. This emphasis on middle-class mantra within

labor unions has been well expressed by many labor leaders themselves. Richard Trumpka, the current president at the AFL-CIO, argued that "it was the labor movement that built the middle class; it was the middle class that made America great" (Lichtenstein 2012, 10). Another labor union activist states that "fighting right-to-work legislation is about standing up for our middle class values" (Lichtenstein 2012, 10).

However, a potential problem lies in the tendency to undermine the notions of working class struggle by overemphasizing how labor unions in the United States can stand up for economic ascent into the middle class. Michael Zweig argues that "when the working class disappears into an amorphous middle class, the working poor—more than forty-six million strong—drops out of the picture" (cited in Lichtenstein 2012, 11). Exactly this phenomenon of the disappearance of working class–consciousness in favor of middle-class aspiration is well reflected in Denver taxi workers' views, as they organized their union-coop partnership. When interviewed, many taxi workers, despite their desperate economic conditions, did not see themselves in class terms. Rather, they saw themselves as "individual entrepreneurs," seeking to climb up to the middle class in America.

In Denver, the consequences of individualistic business ownership undermining notions of class solidarity were made clear as both organizers and rank-and-file members of the existing Denver taxi cooperative (Union Taxi) worried about the possibility of competition from another taxi cooperative when Green Taxi first organized. At the same time, and also reflecting an individualistic and divided labor movement, some Union Taxi coop members attempted to join the new Green Taxi cooperative as double owners of both cooperatives—and subsequently leased their personal work licenses to entirely new taxi drivers—in order to maximize their own material gains.[6] These realities of Union Taxi cooperative members are well described in Azzellini's statement that "the notion of individualistic characteristics of worker cooperatives creates more problems than being an alternative to capitalism" (Grassroots Economic Organizing 2012). When worker cooperatives retain "an individualist notion of ownership: shares can be traded, inherited or accumulated by individuals, and this enables unequal distributions of shares" (Grassroots Economic Organizing 2012).

Business Unionism in the Denver Taxi Cooperative Governance Structure

The governance structure at Union Taxi clearly separates management and labor, and the policy of labor unions in not engaging in cooperative management is clearly reflected in the case of Denver's immigrant taxi workers. This practice reflects the view that "a cooperative is a business and that a labor union does not typically get into the business of running a business", as the president at CWA 7777 clearly stated.[7] As a result, although taxi workers are owners of their cooperative and elect their own president, the ways by which the company is run are similar to any conventional company. Average workers are not involved in company governance as they depend upon seven elected board members to take care of all business concerns. With a clear distinction that line taxi drivers are simply workers and board members who are

elected by workers take all important decisions, workers are not expected (or allowed) to participate in many affairs at their cooperative. In interviews, many workers assessed that it was the responsibility of board members to know how to run the business and to get to know the roles about worker cooperatives: "Worker cooperative education is not given much time at our cooperative and it is okay," said one worker. "Cooperative education is for board members only. Isn't it?"[8] Confirming this view, there are no workers' committees to work on various issues at Union Taxi—workers are simply not involved in collective efforts to sustain business growth, to build alliances with other workers across the region, to engage with lobbying or other political work, or to develop worker education or leadership within the coop.

Instead of showing interest in such (nonexistent) workers committees, interviewed workers expressed that there should be a clear separation between a manager and worker owners, and that managers should have the power over almost all administrative affairs. Over 50 percent of taxi coop owners interviewed believed that they needed "bosses (managers)" to run the coop effectively. Correspondingly, both Union and Green Taxi are governed by seven-member boards of directors, and an elected president, without any other mechanisms for worker engagement in coop governance. In the case of Union Taxi, communication between elected directors and worker owners occurs mostly through e-mail, with two general meetings a year and a few occasional meetings on an as-need basis. Thus, the ways by which Union Taxi members can be engaged in political issues or labor mobilization campaigns are rare, except for a few occasions of participating in taxi workers protests against rising business competition from Uber. Instead of developing a deeper class or political consciousness through their engagement with the taxi union-coop, workers have expressed a strong sentiment to allow professional union organizers at CWA 7777 to lead political campaigns. In this approach, Denver taxi workers reflect the classic characterization of Michels (in *The Logic of Collective Action*), who "insists that workers are passive, preferring to be led" (Levi 2003, 51) and that "the staff became the be-all and end-all of organizational change" (Fletcher and Gapasin 2008, 61).

Business Unionism Shapes the Role of Labor Unions

The CWA 7777 union has interpreted its role almost entirely as a supportive lobbying group for the Green Taxi coop. CWA 7777 has convened meetings of taxi coop owners only when there are needs for workers to participate in a political hearing related to taxi business. The ways in which a union organizer works with leaders on a regular basis are quite limited, as CWA 7777 defines their supportive role for taxi coops as being limited mostly to professional political lobbying. CWA President Lisa Bolton stated in an interview that "we do not run a business. Our job is to pass legislation so that they can open a taxi business."[9] In this regard, the approach of CWA 7777 has been to limit their role to professional advising with a small circle of coop owners, and political lobbying before official licensing bodies, "explicitly *limiting* the field of contestation to a narrow field of concerns" (Perlman 1928, 232).

This limited role of the labor union in supporting workers on the ground may have played a role in the growing skepticism toward the union that Denver taxi coop owners

have expressed over time. Despite the fact that 59 percent of immigrant workers (forty-one members) interviewed by this author early in their organizing campaign expressed receptiveness and a positive attitude toward a labor union, the majority of taxi workers in Denver have changed their positive view to disappointment and skepticism about their current labor union. In a second wave of interviews, many workers expressed discontent that “they [the union] did not contact us. The union provided us with nothing. No education. No contact, Nothing.”[10] Another worker described that “they did nothing to stop Uber. While Uber gets what they want, the labor union could not stop them from doing business in Denver.” Another worker at Union Taxi argued that “the union did nothing for us for the past six years after we opened the cooperative. They only took my money ($360) per year. Why should I pay the money, when they do nothing for us?”[11] As a result of growing worker discontent about their union, workers voted to leave CWA 7777 in 2015, and this decision was also accompanied by the fact that Union Taxi purchased its own building in Fall 2014, and, thus, they saw no need to pay their membership fee to their union for renting space. Linda Harris, vice president at CWA 7777, explained that “they got their own building and decided they didn’t need us anymore” (Blake 2016).

Thus, although workers thought of their own self-interests and perhaps unrealistically expected the labor union to resolve all problems related to their taxi business, CWA 7777 also has made the situation worse by not organizing among workers, not educating workers regarding worker cooperative principles and labor issues, and not building a spirited sense of collective commitment on the ground. Thus, the outcome is the predictable result of a situation in which “a business union reserves all decision-making action to labor leaders—the rank-and-file are not to engage in independent activity, but are to remain in lock-step behind their respective leaders” (Neal 2011).

In short, CWA 7777 was critical in the beginning of Denver taxi worker organizing, in helping workers set up a worker cooperative and helping them pass necessary legislation to open a new business. However, its role after the worker cooperative was established has been dramatically minimized, in accordance with practices of business unionism, and with negative effects on the advancement of workers’ class identity, educational development, broader political involvement, and optimism toward labor organizing in general.

Conclusion

In a pluralistic political environment where diverse approaches toward social movements are possible, a union-cooperative model has both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of the union-cooperative collaboration in a pluralistic political environment like Denver is that it has found room for independent contractor taxi drivers to establish new, officially licensed businesses as an alternative to the existing landscape of exploitive taxi companies. In this environment, labor unions can step up to play a role in passing legislation or political lobbying to back up taxi workers. However, the taxi worker union-cooperative collaboration in Denver has not engaged worker members in political education or leadership development, nor linked them to a broader social movement, as the union-coops have adopted a limited goal of helping individual

taxi workers secure the American dream of business ownership and middle-class identity. By leaving out the notion of "working class" mobilization and by leaving out political education for the members, the union partner of Denver taxi workers has limited itself to professional political lobbying regarding specific business issues as the core role of the union. Therefore, although the combination of worker cooperatives and a labor union has the *potential* to "infuse a renewed energy in the membership to democratize and take control of their workplace" (Geminijen 2012), this potential cannot be actualized without committed action by labor leaders to move beyond business unionism and build more comprehensive approaches to organizing workers.

Class Militancy at Korea's Woojin Bus Cooperative: Another Case Study

Korea's militant labor movement has been much less likely than American labor leaders to take an accommodationist stance vis-à-vis capitalist power. Characterized by a strong tradition of labor antagonism, Korean union movements are well known as militant, waging frequent strikes of national impact (Buchanan and Nicholls 2004; N.-H. Lee and Yi 2012; Roett 1997). In Korea, militant labor union movements were catalyzed by the strong oppression of the military and authoritarian government until the late 1980s. Korean labor unions were developed in the process of resistance against the military government and employers and built a tradition of fighting for changes "in the context of the whole society, not merely within the arena of labor management relations" (Johnston 2001; C. Lee 2005, 1). Thus, the Korean labor movement developed not just to protect "workers' rights in industrial relations, but also to promote the social justice of the working class" (C. Lee 2005, 1). In this way, labor unions typically have been politically oriented, as Korean labor organizing has occurred in the context of state repression for decades, and as Kelly (1998) argues, "state repression can serve to radicalize and generalize labor mobilization."

With the democratization movement in the late 1980s (which ultimately toppled a governing regime), labor unions emerged as an important force to change Korean labor practices and the broader nature of Korean society. Various radical unions were established during the process of democratization in the 1980s and 1990s—a process that was led largely by class-conscious and highly mobilized unions. Throughout this time, major political clashes erupted regularly in the streets between the military government of Chun Doo Hwan and the democratization forces led by Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam (student and union leaders), which allow Koreans to elect their own democratic president for the first time, and catalyzed a burst of worker organizing in Korea. Although union density has declined by one-third in Korea since the mid-1990s following neoliberal economic restructuring (Suzuki 2012, 22), the level of militancy by Korean labor unions, and its willingness to engage in direct confrontations with capitalists, is still well established (Rowley and Bae 2010; Suzuki 2012, 10; Yoo 2012). This paper argues that the legacy of labor militancy has established a tradition of strong antagonism between workers and capitalists, in which an "us versus them attitude" has continued to play an important role in building class consciousness and mobilizing union members for collective actions (Kwon 2013, 270).

Korea's Worker Cooperative Movement

The landscape of Korean union and coop organizing changed dramatically after the 1997 economic crisis in Asia. The rise of worker cooperatives in Korea has occurred in this context of growing informalization and declining union power. It has also occurred as part of a broader civil society movement in which many intellectuals have risen to create organizations and movements that address broader social and economic problems of Korea. In 1999, the passage of the "National Basic Livelihood Security Act" resulted in the creation of self-reliance program centers and self-help community programs to overcome the 1997 financial crisis (J.-s. Kim 2008), and the passage of the Basic Law on Cooperatives in 2012 became critical in the rise of a new worker cooperative movement. Socially responsible enterprises (e.g., Happy Bridge, Actus),[15] could convert to worker cooperatives under the new cooperative law.[12] The very first Korean Federation of Worker Cooperatives (KFWC) was established in April 2014 to support the worker cooperative movement and to increase public awareness of worker cooperatives as an alternative path to job creation and workplace democracy. [16]

Militant Union-Coop Organizing in the Woojin Bus Company

This new breed of worker-owned cooperatives often see themselves as part of a transformational social movement to challenge the corporate-dominated structure of Korean society. In fact, most leaders of the newly emerging Korean worker cooperative movements were also labor activists during the radical democratization movements of the 1980s and 1990s, and they bring the militant perspectives of those transformational days to their current labor politics. The Woojin Bus Company union-coop partnership provides a case in point.

Woojin is a unionized self-management bus company in Korea's mid-region, Chungju.[13] Woojin was the largest private bus company in the Chungju region when it went bankrupt in 2004. Following bankruptcy, bus workers took over the company and reopened it in January 2005, after a 171 days' worker strike. The worker strike was supported by a radical branch of a labor union, Minju Bus Labor Union, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). When KCTU offered to work with the bus workers, 90 percent of workers voted in favor of turning the failing company into a worker cooperative (a self-management company) with the support of the KCTU, switching from their conservative labor union, the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), to a progressive labor union, the KCTU (Gang 2012, 41).

The KCTU representative in the Chungju region, Jaesoo Kim, emerged as a leader in a series of public protests (such as squatting at City Hall to demand the right of workers to run their own company), and providing educational forums and moral support for workers (Gang 2012). Following this campaign, the city of Chungju negotiated with Woojin workers to restructure the Woojin's company debt, and granted workers the right to run the failing bus company. Three hundred workers put down investment money of $5,000 each and workers reopened the doors on January 20, 2005. By 2006, Woojin turned around the failing business to a profit making company, even paying off additional company debt of $1.5 million (W.-S. Kim 2014, 56).

Class-Conscious Labor Organizing: We Are Workers, Not Individual Business Owners

The biggest difference between Woojin union-coop workers and Denver's union-cooperative taxi workers lies in the fact that Woojin workers have a strong sense of worker ownership and collective control over their workplace. Woojin has a strong conviction that "cooperative members are workers, and not capitalists."[14,18] The bylaws of Woojin reflect this principle.

> The goal of the self-management cooperative is that all members as *workers* have equal rights and obligation to operate the self-management company with transparent and democratic principle to create a healthy social and public enterprise that values "labor" and benefits a broader society with a sense of social responsibility.

The Woojin union representative, Kim, further argues that "Woojin's members are workers, and not the owners of a company. We actually don't like to use the terminology, 'owners'." Kim argues,

> We do not emphasize too much the idea of "owners." This company is not about owning the company as the owner. Rather, it is about getting rid of the concept of "ownership" by emphasizing the solidarity of workers and the participation of workers in making decisions on their company as workers.[15]

This self-conscious stance as "workers" and not "owners" of a business reflects the radical and oppositional stance of Woojin vis-à-vis the broader capitalist system. "Woojin is not in the contradictory relationship of the worker-capitalist structure. We are in a worker-worker relationship that has a different production system," explains Kim.[16,20] Woojin focuses on maximizing "worker control" without emphasizing the concept of individual ownership (Slott 1985; Witherell 2013). Avoiding the concept of "ownership" of a business as individuals became important for Woojin to develop a company where workers have a strong sense of collective ownership and worker control.

This philosophy is well shown in a survey of workers conducted by this author. In that survey, the majority of Woojin members view themselves as "workers" or as "worker owners," not as "business owners." In fact, the concept of "worker owner" at Woojin refers more to collective ownership of a company by workers, rather than to the notion of individual ownership of business shares. Responding to a question regarding what is the largest benefit of a self-management company, 62 percent of workers (116 workers out of 165 surveys) responded: "efforts to create collective value," followed by 27 percent of respondents that chose "democratic and humanitarian working conditions" as the second largest benefit. In this regard, Woojin's self-management model is similar to what Dario Azzellini calls a "collective or social form of ownership." What Woojin promotes is the idea that "enterprises are seen not as privately owned" (belonging to individuals or groups of shareholders) but as social property, or the "common property" of the community of workers, "managed directly and democratically by those most affected by them" (Grassroots Economic Organizing

2012). By removing the contradiction between capital and labor in this way, a capitalist business is transformed into a communal project, collectively owned.

Class Organizing at Woojin: Governance Structure

The legal ownership structure of Woojin is not yet as a worker-owned cooperative, as it is still in the form of a traditional corporation, even after the workers' takeover in 2005. The corporation is owned 50 percent by workers, and the remaining 50 percent of company shares are designated to three persons who are highly respected in Chungju as symbolic owners. However, governance is democratically controlled by workers. The board of directors consists of thirteen members, with eight of them being elected worker representatives. Regular meetings of the board to discuss matters regarding finance, budget, and operations occur monthly, and there are twelve self-management committee meetings wherein workers participate in discussions and decision-making on the company's business.

The governance structure of Woojin has become more sophisticated over time, but this sophisticated matrix of governing committees has been the result of an experience where Woojin went through a major internal crisis in 2008. Sixty bus drivers decided to leave the company, demanding their retirement funds and salaries of about $4.6 million in total at that time. As a result, Woojin was almost at the point of company seizure in bankruptcy court, due to accumulating debts. However, the remaining 240 workers decided voluntarily not to take more than 60 percent of their salaries for six months until they could turn the company around (H. Kim 2013; see also W.-S. Kim 2014).

After the crisis in 2008, Woojin re-adopted the principle that management should not be separated from workers' labor. Woojin was originally operated according to the principle of separation of management and labor so that "workers would not become possessed with the idea of ownership, if they did not get into management areas,"[17] but this principle did not hold and led to disaffection by the workers who abandoned the company in 2008. By switching to a new principle of "one management, one labor," Woojin revamped its internal management structure, and started a series of in-depth educational programs to help members understand the principle of equal rights and equal obligation. With the establishment of twelve self-management committees that cover all affairs of the organization, Woojin also set up a six month "self-management committee class" with twenty workers at a time to help them understand how to run a worker-owned cooperative. Those education programs include: meeting facilitation, know capitalism, philosophy of labor and workers, labor movement history, Woojin's history, self-management philosophy, and Woojin's self-management committee roles (W.-S. Kim 2014, 82-83). The classes have been coordinated by a labor union representative since 2009, and the classes constitute something of a workers' self-management school, which includes ten weekend classes, one cultural travel course, a graduation ceremony, and graduation thesis presentation (W.-S. Kim 2014, 82).

These extensive classes have become critical in shaping a new culture of worker ownership at Woojin and in fostering a change in workers' perspectives. A union leader at Woojin, Jaesoo Kim, argues,

> You need to change people and we have to make it from scratch. If you look at paper to draw upon, you have to start from scratch on a new white paper to draw pictures. It is the same thing. You have to change the members and they can be changed through education. In other words, when you want to change the culture of workplace, you have to change the way of their thinking. Thus, changing culture is linked to changing the views and thoughts.[18]

Changes in worker perspectives within Woojin can be seen in responses to a survey conducted by this author. In that survey, 110 out of 165 workers responded that they participated in 100 percent of meetings, including business committee meetings and educational programming. In rating these meetings and programs, workers selected "workers' culture" (fifty-one workers), followed by the "self-management philosophy" (forty-seven workers) as the most useful.

Responding to the question of "what is the best part of being a self-managed firm," seventy-four workers responded that "I got to understand and learn more about self-management" as the number one benefit, followed by "the creation of democratic and less stressful working conditions" (thirty-eight workers). To summarize, this commitment to creating a democratic governance structure to synthesize capital and labor paralleled a strong emphasis on cultural changes within the workplace, and in workers' own consciousness, through intense education and leadership development to help develop workers' class consciousness.

Class Consciousness at Woojin: The Role of Labor Unions

The role of the labor union at Woojin has shifted substantially over the years, as Woojin's labor union has moved away from the traditional role of a professional negotiator on workers' behalf. Instead, it has adopted the cooperative principle of organic "participation" and "help" within the cooperative to foster solidarity and broader class consciousness among workers. Heegu Ji, the director of the self-management committee, argues,

> if the labor union once meant a negotiation for better wages as a counterpart for employers in the past, the labor union now means "participation and help" of the cooperative internally to make sure that all are working in harmony.[19]

Wage setting processes and solidarity campaigns are examples of union organizers working collaboratively with active members, and not lobbying professionally on their behalf. Although labor union representatives still negotiate on wages, the final decision on wages is taken at committee meetings with workers. As wage negotiations are no longer the major role of the union, the labor union at Woojin is more committed to "building solidarity with other community groups,"[20] and workers at Woojin have been active at various community rallies to support broader causes. In the survey, 58 percent of workers (ninety-six out of 165) surveyed responded that they participate in a community rally between 1-5 times a year to support broader community causes, while 20 percent of workers (thirty-two workers) responded that they participate in 6 to 10 rallies a year. Also, over 64 percent of workers (106 out of 166 workers)

responded that they saw the labor union as a necessary institution, responding that the most important role of a labor union within the cooperative is to build solidarity with other community groups. As the director at the self-management committee stated, "We continue to carry the sentiment of the working class, and we are helping others as part of the working class struggle."[21]

Thus, Woojin's concept of worker ownership is self-understood as part of a working class struggle in capitalist society and this notion of solidary working class struggle is quite different from the view that "cooperatives can divide working classes" (Kasmir 1996, 198). In a question regarding the level of solidarity among cooperative members at Woojin, 74 percent of workers (122 workers) responded that they felt strong solidarity with their coworkers, while 63 percent (104 workers) also felt solidarity to other workers in the community. Although the rate of solidarity for other workers in the community is smaller than internal solidarity, this percent is much higher than Denver's taxi workers, who almost universally speak of themselves as individual business owners and not as solidary members of a working class.

In short, Woojin's self-management philosophy and commitment to broader labor solidarity shows that a union-coop alliance can be formed with the radical principle of self-management and worker control. By emphasizing worker involvement in management, Korea's Woojin does not eliminate the concept of "class" or "class consciousness" of workers. Rather, "class consciousness" is actually the foci of Woojin organizers in creating a democratic workplace with a sense of worker control.

Conclusion

Although the recent emergence of union-cooperative collaboration has shown creativity in bringing visions of labor radicalism to the labor movement, coop-labor union relationships should not automatically be assumed to be more politically oriented or more democratic by nature. Rather the nature of these relationships is shaped by an internal factor (the leadership of unions and cooperatives) and by an external factor (the labor history and political culture of their nation). These factors help explain why the examined union-coop partnership in the United States shows tendencies of business unionism, while the union-cooperative partnership in Korea has shown labor militancy. In both cases, the concepts of "class" and "class consciousness" were foundationally important in shaping the nature of the union-cooperative partnership that emerged on the ground.

Another thing to note is that the examined union cooperatives in the United States and Korea have different ways of responding to the antagonism between capital and labor. Although both labor unions in the United States and Korea, to some extent, took a position of uniting capital and labor by creating a new labor organization, a union cooperative, the way in which they defined capital-labor relations in the emergent union cooperative was different. Denver's union cooperative members have more tendency to work toward becoming owners (capitalists), while Woojin's cooperative members have had a tendency to work toward becoming mobilized workers with a strong worker solidarity. Thus, while the union cooperative in Denver is best seen as

an alternative *capitalist* institution, committed to converting workers into business owners, the union-coop in Korea is best seen as an alternative *labor* institution, committed to converting individual workers into a class-conscious labor movement. We can expect very different trajectories and subsequent results to emerge from these two very different models of labor organizing.

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Notes

1. This phrase was stated in *Progressive Labor*, 1975, Volume 10, p. 67. The original statement was written by the Progressive Labor Movement (PLM) entitled “Road to Revolution,” 1964.
2. An interview with a worker, July 10, 2013.
3. An interview with a worker at the Denver Airport, on September 11, 2015. I conducted semi- structured interviews with sixty nine workers between 2014 and 2015.
4. An interview with a worker J, September 6, 2015.
5. An interview with a worker, September 11, 2015.
6. An interview with a worker J, September 27, 2014.
7. An interview with Lisa Bolton, President of Communication Workers of America (CWA) 7777, December 10, 2014
8. An interview with a worker, Septembr 15, 2015
9. An interview with Lisa Bolton, president of Communication Workers of America (CWA) 7777, December 10, 2014.
10. An interview with a worker, September 11, 2015
11. An interview with a worker, September 20, 2015.
12. Happy Bridge is a national restraurant franchise with seventy five worker owners. There are more than 550 franchises nationwide and it was converted to a worker coopertive in 2013. Actus is an IT company in Korea which was converted to a worker cooperative in 2013.
13. Woojin is often called a "self-managemnt company" in Korea because many scholars argue that its ideology is inspired by self-management companies in Yugoslavia. However, this paper will describe Woojin as a worker cooperative as its functions and principles are the same as those described in worker cooperative principles. Also, Woojin is an associate member of the Korean Federation of Worker Cooperatives (KFWC).
14. An interview with Jaesoo Kim, representative of Woojin, April 27, 2015.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. An interview with Heegu Ji, Director at the Workers’ Self-management committee, April 29, 2015.

20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.

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