

# UTCC VOICE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE UNITED TAXIDRIVERS COMMUNITY COUNCIL

## UTCC-NTWA SIGN HISTORIC MEMORANDUM CHICAGO CABDRIVERS TO AFFILIATE WITH NTWA (AFL-CIO)

BY BIJU MATHEW, SECRETARY OF NTWA/AFL-CIO

**O**N APRIL 21, 2014 FAYEZ KHOZINDAR, Chairman of the United Taxidivers Community Council of Chicago (UTCC) and Bhairavi Desai, President, National Taxi Workers Alliance of the AFL-CIO (NTWA) signed an historic MoU in order to speed up the UTCC's affiliation with the AFL-CIO's national taxi union.

NTWA was chartered as the 57th union of the AFL-CIO in 2012 and currently has three affiliates - New York, Philadelphia and Austin and works in eight other cities with local organizations seeking affiliation. These include Houston and Dallas in Texas, Montgomery and Prince Georges County in the Washington, DC metro area, San Francisco and Oakland in California, Boston and Chicago.

The UTCC was founded in 2008 and has for six years now consistently fought for the rights of Chicago taxi drivers. UTCC has over the years built numerous services for drivers including a free bond card and discounted representation at 400 W. Superior and fought pitched battles with the city and the big garages on behalf of drivers.



Most recently UTCC "Lease Overcharge Defense Campaign" has already resulted in over \$27,000 being awarded back to drivers with more coming in every month.

"We are proud to announce this partnership with UTCC in Chicago" said Bhairavi Desai, President of NTWA at the Press Conference announcing the MoU. "UTCC has shown enormous dedication to drivers and we are here to help build driver power in Chicago. What we promise is to stand with Chicago drivers in every one of their fights and bring Chicago into the mainstream of the taxi drivers' national movement," she added.

NTWA's flagship union is the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA) with over 17,000 members and 18 years of experience organizing taxi drivers. Over 80% of NYTWA's annual budget--that supports eight staff to serve the membership, subsidized benefits and five different current campaigns--is raised by its membership.

"It's a taxi driver's union, for taxi drivers only, built and run by taxi drivers" said Fayez Khozindar.

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## The UTCC and the Steps to Unionize

BY PETER ALI ENGER

**W**HEN THE UNITED TAXIDRIVERS Community Council came into being six years ago, we had many debates about just what kind of organization we wanted to become. These were a continuation of the discussions some of us had started in the AUPD, Melissa Callahan's first organization. It was clear: cabdrivers wanted a "union"—an organization recognized by the city and the companies, which could advocate for our just treatment and our rights as workers under United States labor laws. The problem was, cabdrivers had been classified as "independent contractors" since the late 1970's, and as such, we were not employees and could not form the traditional and legally recognized "union" recognized by US labor laws.

However, there was a way forward. We researched US labor history, and discovered that

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## THE BATTLE FOR O'HARE

*UberX Caught Sneaking In, but soon it could be legal*

BY CHRIS CHANDLER

**I**T ALL BEGAN ON FRIDAY, MAY 2ND, WHEN UberX, the giant ride share company, sent a message to its drivers that they could start picking up at O'Hare and Midway, and giving detailed instructions on how to go about it.

**"IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT: uberX partners will be able to pick up at O'Hare and Midway Airports EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY! Read on for Pro-Tips on where to pick up passengers."**

Except that UberX is still banned from picking up at the airports. When the UTCC's Peter Ali Enger saw a copy of the Uber text he sent an urgent message to the Commissioner of Dept. of Aviation, and Chicago media, pointing out that UberX was barred from the airports, was not paying airport departure taxes, threatened the safety of airport passengers, and would severely impact licensed cab and limousine drivers.

Once the Dept. of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection was informed of this Uber announcement by reporters, they responded on

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 AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE, COMMUNITY ALLY

**COMMON SENSE CORNER**

BY FAYEZ KHOZINDAR

**ARE YOU READY FOR THE UNION?**

IF YOUR ANSWER IS YES, THEN YOU HAVE TO join now.

The United Taxidriers Community Council (UTCC) is a taxi driver membership based organization promoting social and political change regarding the treatment of the taxidriver community.

The driving principal behind our organization is the need to unite all taxi drivers in their struggle for justice in the cab driving community.

When taxi drivers are united, we have a greater capacity to influence changes in our lives. One driver can fight his case at 400 W. Superior and win without affecting any great changes in the system. However, 1000 drivers demanding justice at 400 W. Superior influence the systematic flaws in the legal system and can potentially create tangible changes in the administrative legal process.

The UTCC is an organization that is internally governed by the democratic process. Our members drive the issues that we take up, and all members have the potential to become leaders within the organization. If the UTCC members are not happy with the leadership, they have an opportunity to use the democratic process and vote for new leadership.

Taxi drivers are regularly treated unfairly by an unjust system. Because it is the system itself that is flawed, change can only come from drivers uniting and demanding justice. The UTCC has accomplished historic success in the taxi industry such as the parking while praying at O'Hare airport and ending the parking bans on business streets in many north side wards. Furthermore, we have persuaded the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection to incorporate the safety placard into the fare sheet and now it is visible with its red rectangle from the back seat of every cab in the city of Chicago. And we organized seven health fairs at both airports to test

and examine more than 560 drivers for free.

During the UTCC's meeting with the BACP officials, and while investigating the lease over charge issues we suggested the implementation of a uniform lease for all companies to stop this unjust practices of overcharging the drivers, and that was incorporated into the latest city ordinance.

With the help of UTCC more than 52 drivers have filed complaints of lease overcharges against the cab companies and the drivers have recouped more than \$27,000.00 and for the first time in history the city of Chicago has fined a taxicab company \$16,000.00 for lease overcharges.

And because UTCC is your Union, and can only survive and get stronger by your feedback and participation, we have established a network of bulletin boards all over the city to keep you informed of your rights.

We are proud of our newsletter the VOICE, which is **your** VOICE since May 15, 2008, and we are proud of our office which opened its door for you since June of 2009. We are proud of all these accomplishments, but we know that there is much more to be done, because we want the drivers to feel empowered and to feel that they are connected with the broader taxidrivering community nationwide.

The UTCC is connected with the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA), which became the 57th union chartered by the AFL-CIO on August 3rd, 2011, and authorized it to unionize the taxi drivers throughout the United States. It will mean greater power, influence and resources for the fight for justice, rights, respect and dignity for tens of thousands of taxi drivers.

In a statement, the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO said:

"The success of the Taxi Workers Alliance will provide an inspiring example of how workers can overcome legal and organizational barriers

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**Introducing Brittany Oehmke— UTCC's newest organizer and contributor!**

Hello UTCC members, readers, drivers and supporters, I'd like to take the time to introduce myself as the newest organizer and secretary of the United Taxidriers Community Council. My name is Brittany Oehmke (pronounced "um-kee") and for three months this summer I will be filling in for organizer and office staff, Brittany Harthan. Understandably I will expect jokes about having the same first name and will be sometimes referred to as "Brittany 2".

I am excited to work with the drivers in addition to Fayez and Peter in continuing the already many successes UTCC has and will accomplish. I encourage drivers to contact me at utccchicago@gmail.com with any questions, concerns, ideas, and anything else you would like to discuss.

I am currently a full time student, entering my Senior year in the fall at Roosevelt University. I am pursuing my Bachelors degree in Paralegal Studies and I have just fulfilled my minor in political science. I intend to continue organization type work in the future as well as getting involved with civil rights and civil liberties cases and bringing justice to those who most need it in the city of Chicago.

So far I have seen the passion of the drivers as well as those contributing to the success of UTCC and it has been nothing but inspiring. It's so great when I see people discussing the real issues of what's going on in

the streets of Chicago and continue to get something done about it. And that is what I am here to do. I am here to listen, discuss, take action and prevail with my fellow members and do all that I can to help. I have the highest hopes for cab drivers and UTCC to accomplish our current goal of becoming an affiliate of the NY Taxi Worker's Alliance, as well as the AFL-CIO.

With such great things ahead of the United Taxidriers Community Council I look forward to being a part of every step it will take to become affiliated with AFL-CIO and the National Taxi Workers Alliance. I encourage drivers to inform fellow drivers, friends, peers and family to join us as you are all welcomed to accompany us on our quest as I hope you would, to improve the daily lives of cabdrivers in Chicago and everywhere.

We are here for you, and I welcome anyone to reach out to UTCC to continue discussing all aspects of taxicab drivers' daily lives and get involved to achieve our goals of increased wages, ending lease overcharges, defeating fabricated traffic tickets, increased safety for drivers, and the overall well being of one of our hardest working professions in the city of Chicago. I'd like to allocate this time to thank Fayez, Chairman of UTCC, and Peter, lead organizer and treasurer of UTCC as well as AFSC for this opportunity. I welcome all drivers into



**OUR VISION**

To organize and unify all licensed chauffeurs in the Chicago area, so we can collectively overcome oppression and achieve economic and social justice.

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**We welcome your contributions feedback and letters!**

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our office as they had welcomed me. We are located at 2040 N. Milwaukee and I am in the office Monday Tuesday and Wednesday from 1-7PM. I look forward to meeting you!

—BRITTANY OEHMKE

# Chicago Cabdrivers File Lawsuit against Yellow, Carriage, Dispatch and Flash Affiliation owners

*Class Action Suit will challenge classification as “independent contractors”, demand payment of back wages for cabdrivers*

BY SHANNON LISS-RIORDAN, ATTORNEY-AT-LAW



Attorney Shannon Liss-Riordan (center) meeting with UTCC Steering Committee members regarding potential legal actions in Chicago.

[Attorney Shannon Liss-Riordan is a worker’s rights lawyer living and working out of Boston, Massachusetts. The UTCC first encountered her in Boston in 2013, where Chairman Fayez Khozindar was meeting and visiting with our sister and brother cabdrivers in the Boston taxi drivers union, the Boston Area Taxi Drivers Association. We were intrigued with the work she was doing with the Boston drivers, and impressed with her track record advocating for workers in cases nationally. We invited her to come to Chicago to explore the possibility of bringing a similar lawsuit against Chicago’s largest cab companies. After several meetings, several Chicago cabdrivers were happy to sign up as lead plaintiffs in this lawsuit.]

**I**N MARCH OF 2014, TAXI DRIVERS IN CHICAGO filed a federal lawsuit that could bring about historical changes to the taxi industry. For the last several decades, the taxi industry in Chicago, like in much of the country, has run on a system by which taxi drivers have paid fees in advance for the opportunity to work. By classifying drivers as independent contractors, taxi companies have been able to charge drivers for their jobs, in the form of “shift fees”, as well as requiring them to pay business expenses, such as gas. Previously, taxi drivers had generally been classified as employees, but in the 1970s and 80s, a shift began in which drivers began to be classified

as independent contractors. Under this system, taxi companies profit at the expense of drivers, because the companies get paid their shift fees, day in and day out, while the drivers take all the risks.

In the federal lawsuit, we are challenging the taxi companies regarding this system of classifying drivers as independent contractors. In Boston, we filed a similar case two years ago against Boston’s largest taxi companies. A local newspaper investigation into the business practices of cab companies resulted in the IRS confiscating files from the largest cab company in Boston. After we went in to request an injunction against the same company so they wouldn’t transfer their assets and hide their money, the trial court judge ruled that the drivers are likely to succeed in their case, and granted an injunction against the owner of Boston Cab. This meant he couldn’t transfer his assets outside the ordinary course of business, and it preserved them for the drivers, in the event our lawsuit was successful. The Massachusetts Appeals Court recently affirmed that decision, also ruling that the drivers are likely to win their case against the taxi companies.

We were able to bring this case in Boston because Massachusetts has a very strict law against misclassifying employees as independent contractors. Under Massachusetts law, if an individual performs work in the usual course of business of an employer, then that individual is an employee. Illinois also has a very strict law against misclassification, which makes us hopeful that the courts in Illinois will reach the same result as the courts in Massachusetts.

In this case, we are suing the cab compa-

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## Lawyer fights for low-wage workers’ rights

*Shannon Liss-Riordan has built her reputation representing those who say they were wronged*

BY KATIE JOHNSTON, REPRINTED FROM THE BOSTON GLOBE

**S**TRIPPERS DENIED WAGES AND TIPS. PIZZA makers swindled out of overtime pay. Cleaning ladies, taxi drivers, and truckers forced to pay franchise fees while being treated like hourly employees.

From a 20th-floor office with sweeping views of Beacon Hill, Shannon Liss-Riordan and her team of lawyers have represented them all. In the three and a half years since Lichten & Liss-Riordan opened its doors, the law firm has won tens of millions of dollars for low-wage workers, often immigrants, who claim to have been wronged by their employers.

In the process, Liss-Riordan has won admiration as a champion of blue-collar workers and a reputation as a tough litigator putting entire industries on notice for breaking wage and hour laws. She is also seen by critics as a media-hungry attorney who uses obscure laws to scare companies away from Massachusetts — and reaps millions of dollars while her low-wage clients collect a few thousand apiece.

Liss-Riordan says she and her firm are doing important work, giving employees the ability to fight back against huge companies that are mis-



treating their workers in order to save money.

“There are just so many ways that employers take advantage of low-wage workers,” she said. “Especially among immigrant workers, they think they’re not going to step up and challenge abuses. They think they can take advantage of them because they don’t speak English. And it has

Liss-Riordan, 43, had planned to be a civil rights attorney until she found her calling in employment litigation. The Harvard-educated lawyer and her partner, Harold Lichten, focus on class-action lawsuits involving independent con-

tractor and tips violations. The firm’s nine lawyers have represented thousands of clients, who include waiters, FedEx drivers, cable installers, call center employees, skycaps, and janitors.

Among their biggest victories: a \$14 million judgment against Starbucks Corp. for violating a Massachusetts law that prevents supervisors from sharing in baristas’ tips.

Liss-Riordan is the legal force behind more than 100 Upper Crust workers, mostly Brazilian immigrants, who allege the now-bankrupt Boston pizza chain cheated them out of overtime pay.

She is also the lawyer who persuaded a federal judge in Boston to rule that Coverall North America Inc. owed \$3 million for illegally collecting franchise fees from 100 cleaning workers. Suits are pending against a half-dozen major cleaning companies nationally.

Workers believe having Liss-Riordan on their side gives them the power to fight back.

“We can go up against a corporation and get our voice heard,” said Gerardo Vazquez, one of the lead plaintiffs in a federal class-action lawsuit against the cleaning company Jan-Pro Franchising International Inc.

Vazquez alleges that Jan-Pro charged him

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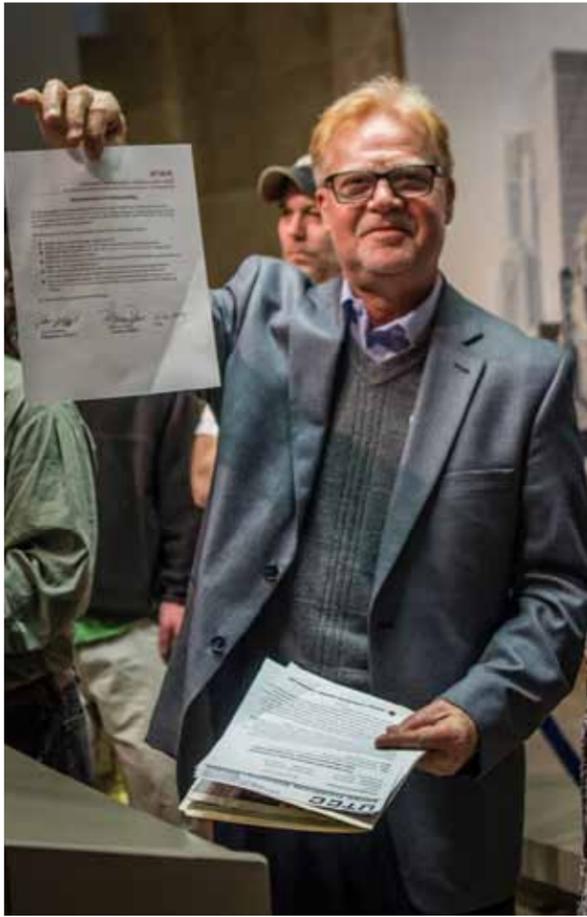
**UTCC-NTWA Sign Historic Memorandum**

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dar at the MoU press conference explaining why UTCC made the decision to join NTWA. “We have been organizing in Chicago for over 6 years and now with NTWA’s wealth of experience behind us, we know this was truly in the interest of Chicago taxi drivers,” he added.

“As part of our work for the NTWA, I have been to many cities - from San Francisco to Dallas and Boston to LA and I must say that Chicago is the city where drivers have it worst” said Ronald Blount, VP of the NTWA. “Chicago drivers haven’t seen a fare raise since 2005 and leases have gone up every year. With UberX and Lyft in the mix wages have been further depressed. There’s only one reason why things are so bad in Chicago,” Blount emphasized. “If you want the city to take you seriously, there is only one way to do. Build power through membership. UTCC should be able to walk into City Hall and say we represent 3000 drivers. Then they will listen,” he concluded.

Two weeks before the public announcement of the MoU, the 17-member Steering Committee of UTCC met with NTWA representatives to work through the details of the MoU. Presenting his reasons for supporting the idea of affiliation, Peter Ali Enger, Secretary of the UTCC had said “we are all drivers around this table and we know that nobody organizes drivers better than drivers themselves. With NTWA behind us we bring the power of a national taxi drivers movement to Chicago. When we build Chicago, we



build the national and when we build the National, we build Chicago.”

Chicago is the second largest taxi market in the US. With 12,000 drivers we can build a union that has tremendous power. The teachers shook Chicago in 2013. Taxi drivers will shape politics on the ground in Chicago in 2014 and into the future. Viva UTCC! Viva NTWA! ■

**COMMON SENSE CORNER**

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to create powerful unions and of how the AFL-CIO stands committed, no matter the obstacles, to helping all workers find a path to winning justice in the job.”

After that, Austin, TX became the first affiliate of the National Taxi Workers Alliance (NTWA) since the chartering of the new union with New York and Philadelphia as the founding affiliates.

We in the UTCC believe in unity and solidarity with all taxi drivers in the USA and we share NTWA’s vision to unify all the drivers nationwide to achieve justice, respect and human rights as workers.

Here we ask you CHICAGO taxi drivers to take your historic responsibility towards your lives, your jobs and the future of your families, and join the United Taxidriers Community Council as dues-paying members. We have a core group of dedicated and committed staff who sacrifice a lot of their time and energy to carry out this work. It’s no small effort to build a social organization and an infrastructure to achieve our goals.

A membership is \$120.00 per year, cheap by any standards of the unions you might compare it to. It comes out to \$10.00 a month. We also ask you to volunteer your time to keep building your union. Imagine what we could achieve when each one of us donate one hour per month to build our future!

That’s 10,000 hours per month!

We have many ideas about what can be done with your time donated, and we are open to many more. Just come and join the “visionary bunch” and talk to us, and let us all work together to build our UNION. We in UTCC cannot do it alone, but all TOGETHER -WE CAN DO IT!!! ■

**The Battle for O’Hare**

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Monday by warning Uber to back off. “The city has not authorized any ridesharing company to offer pick-ups at either airport, and any company offering that service is subject to enforcement, which includes tickets and vehicle impoundment. The city intends to strictly enforce this policy.”

It was a major embarrassment for Uber. “UberX Caught Illegally Sharing,” read the headline on a front page Tribune story. The Tribune editorialized that the incident cast doubt on the company’s integrity. Uber is a multi billion dollar worldwide company that spends heavily on marketing and public relations. This was the first misstep the company made in Chicago.

But it turned out the battle over the airports had just begun. and it looks like Uber just jumped the gun. The online Sun-Times story about the Uber catch also revealed that Mayor Rahm Emmanuel’s Rideshare Ordinance had been amended to authorize ride share at the airports! The story quoted the new amendment, which changed the text that had specifically barred rideshares at the airports and McCormick Place, by adding that the commissioner could decide if they should be allowed.

The mayor’s rideshare ordinance was scheduled for a vote at the May 28 City Council meeting. We at the UTCC lobbied aldermen to defeat the ordinance, sending them a detailed analysis of why it almost entirely fails to regulate companies with part time employees, and fails to put any limits on the number of ride share companies or drivers.

We also made the argument that opening the airports to ride share would be an absolute bonanza for companies like Uber. Since mayor Emmanuel’s brother Ari is a major investor in Uber,

(as described in a Sun Times story by Dan Mihalopoulos April 23) it was a clear conflict of interest for the mayor to enrich the company. As Mihalopoulos wrote, “Having the mayor’s brother sharing in Uber’s future looks a lot like the sort of thing that isn’t at all new or different here.”

Ald. John Arena (45th) did what he could to oppose the ordinance, voting against it in committee and proposing an amendment at the Council meeting that would have stripped out the airport authorization. The amendment lost 34 to 9, and the ordinance was passed by a vote of 34 to 12. We have thanked those aldermen who voted no. In addition to Arena they were Bob Fioretti (2nd), Pat Dowell (3rd), Robert Sawyer (6th), Anthony Beale (9th), Edward Burke (14th), Lona Lane (18th), Ricardo Munoz (22), Michael Zalewski (23rd), Jason Ervin (28), Scott Waguespack (32nd) and Nick Sposato (36th).

So now that the ordinance has passed, and is scheduled to take effect in late August, what can be done? There is a state ride share law that appears close to passage, and many had hoped that it would place more reasonable restrictions on the new companies. But the law has been so amended there is little left. For instance the clause that barred ride share companies from the airports has disappeared.

Ald. Arena believes the city ordinance will have to be amended to comply with the state law, when it is passed, which will be another chance to voice our strong opposition. Also the Commissioner of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection is required to have hearings on the new regulations, which will present us with an opportunity to voice our opposition, and possibly demonstrate how strongly Chicago cabdrivers feel about allowing UberX at the airports and McCormick Place.

The battle for O’Hare has just begun. ■

**GET INVOLVED IN THE STRUGGLE!**

Join the fight for rights, respect and human dignity!

**Call UTCC Today!**  
773-342-8822

# Round 1 Ends With Mixed Results

## UberX, Lyft et al Brought Under Some Regulation

BY BIJU MATHEW, NEW YORK TAXI WORKERS ALLIANCE/AFL-CIO



Biju Mathew Secretary of the NTWA organizing at Midway airport

ON WEDNESDAY MAY 28TH, THE CITY Council of Chicago approved Mayor Emmanuel's TNP ordinance with a vote of 34 to 10. Among the Aldermen who voted against the new ordinance were Ald. Arena, Ald. Beale and Ald. Sawyer. Two weeks before the Mayor's ordinance was passed, the UTCC, Chicago's taxi drivers union, blocked UberX from operating at both airports. This victory ensured that the Mayor did not hand the airports over to UberX and Lyft prematurely. But Mayor Emmanuel slipped in an amendment that would legalize ride share pick ups at the airports.

The battle is not over yet, however. *Nowhere near over.* In every US city that the so-called RideShare business model was launched (and we prefer to call it the RideSteal model) the struggle to create a level playing field goes on for several years.

In San Francisco, Lyft and later UberX came on the streets in 2012. It is now over two-and-a-half years later and there are two lawsuits and two legislations pending. Drivers from across the entire state of California - San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, and San Diego to name just a few - are united and currently mobilizing towards the first of a set of state-wide actions. What we know from

experiences such as those going on in California, is that the battle against RideSteal goes through many cycles and different power centers before it is really over. Mayor Emanuel's brother may be an investor in Uber, but neither the Mayor nor his brother will have full control on how the RideSteal battle ends in Chicago. Maybe he won't even be Mayor by the time we finish this battle.

There are some among us drivers here in Chicago who feel that UberX and Lyft are good for us. "It at least gives us another option... and I don't have to pay lease," Ahmed, a veteran driver from Egypt told this correspondent a few weeks ago at the airport. A few other drivers who were listening to Ahmed nodded in agreement--but before any of them could speak a much larger group of drivers who are against UberX broke into a loud conversation trying to convince Ahmed he was wrong. "But why do you care?" Ahmed argued back, "when have the garage owners done you any favors... they have destroyed you with high leases and now you are fighting to save their medallion. Why should I?"

### Ahmed is right, but also wrong!!

He is right that the reason UberX or Lyft can enter Chicago is because the large companies have exploited drivers mercilessly for many decades. We owe them **nothing**. Nothing at all! And along with the City's mismanagement of the taxi industry, this has resulted in a lack of drivers to fill the taxis, and less taxis on the streets to serve the public. This is the opportunity that the RideSteal

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# Sister and Brother Cabdrivers of Chicago!

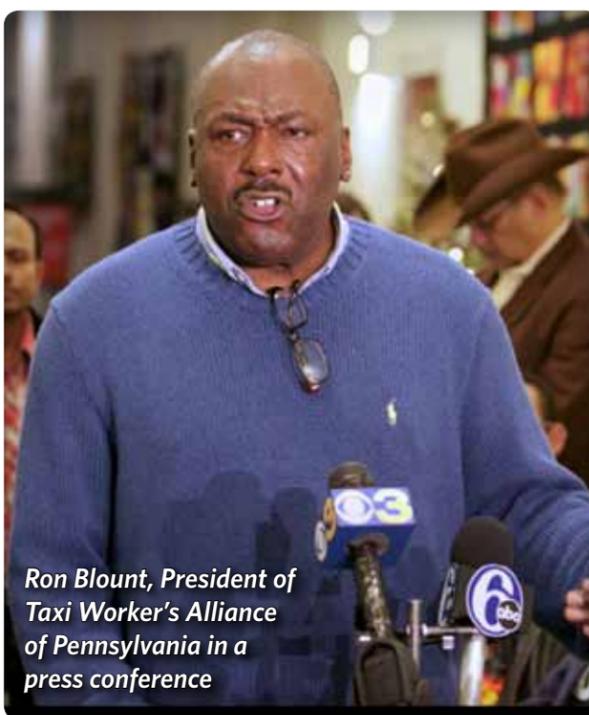
A message from Philadelphia, by Ron Blount, President, TWAP

ON BEHALF OF THE 1,200 MEMBERS OF the Taxi Workers Alliance of Pennsylvania (TWAP), we bring you greetings and solidarity! Following is a short summary of our driver organizing efforts in Philadelphia:

Between the years of 2004 to 2005, five taxi drivers were murdered in Philadelphia. In that same year, cabdrivers in Philadelphia had not received a fare increase in 14 years. These dehumanizing working conditions forced us to form our Union. This was not an easy thing to do, as drivers fought against each other for fares in the streets, spoke different languages, and had different religious views.

As we organized and spoke to the drivers, city regulators, and the general public, we realized through many conversations that no one cared about us as service workers--and organizing seemed increasingly impossible, and especially since 95% of us were first generation immigrants. The taxi regulators, taxi owners, police, passengers, and even people on the streets looked upon us as being inferior--second or even third-class citizens. Individually, we couldn't change this dynamic, but united, we could fight for our dignity, respect, and rights. We finally reached out to the New York Taxi Workers Alliance and began engaging in many strategy sessions resulting in the building of our union.

Since our beginning, we have focused on four main pillars to build our Union: **capacity building (membership), safety of drivers, healthcare and**



Ron Blount, President of Taxi Worker's Alliance of Pennsylvania in a press conference

**other personal benefits, and economic enhancement.** Together, our members felt that these pillars would provide every driver in Philadelphia with a better working environment. Our strategies and tactics shift over time from legal actions, political pressure, and non-violent direct action (mobilization). We try to use scientific and political analysis to determine which strategies will be more successful in each situation, studying the conditions we are faced with at each time.

Our struggles have given us successes in the following areas: 3 fare increases, 2 fuel surcharges, reduction in fines by 75%, reduction in tickets written against drivers, changes to the taxi regulator's court system, healthcare enrollment, and many other victories.

Our most precious victory was to invalidate the 294 pages of taxi regulations and have them re-written with drivers at the table. This institutional change limits what the taxi regulator can do in the future. Currently, our campaigns include a drivers' owned and operated dispatch cooperative, another fare increase, and more safety initiatives for drivers.

In 2011, the New York Taxi Workers Alliance and the Philly group formed the National Taxi Workers Alliance (AFL-CIO), Austin Texas joined a year later. The National is now active in over 15 U.S. cities including our partnership with UTCC. Chicago cabdrivers! You are incredibly important to the national strategy of organizing cabdrivers all over the US! Chicago represents the **2<sup>nd</sup> largest taxi fleet** in the U.S., and what happens in Chicago is vital to taxi workers everywhere. Under UTCC leadership, we believe that Chicago taxi drivers will build one amazing Union. Many victories have already been accomplished by UTCC including lease overcharge repayment, the strike that shocked the city, benefits for UTCC members, and much more. I would greatly urge any taxi driver that have not already done so, to join UTCC today. ■

## Steps to Unionize

Continued from Page 1

actors and professional sports athletes were also classified as “independent contractors”, and suffered many workplace injustices until they, too, became organized. Once they had organized, and had work actions (strikes, and such) and legal actions (lawsuits), they eventually gained recognition for their organizations for collective bargaining rights, working conditions and work standards, minimum pay, and other traditional workers’ rights. Both actors and athletes have organizations that are considered “unions” for non-traditional workers. If they could do it, cabdrivers could do it, too!

### Relationship with New York

The next step was what kind of organization we could build until we could gain “union” status. We reached out to New York, and visited several cabdriver organizations around the country, including San Francisco and Los Angeles. We discovered that most cabdriver organizations formed 501C-3 status not-for-profit organizations, as this model had the kind of structure that contained transparency and features for democratic process for decision-making that was accountable to the membership, including a Constitution, By-laws, and a Board of Directors.

So that is what the UTCC decided to do. We had the bones of a Constitution from the work we had done in AUPD and we took about six months of meetings to negotiate the details before it was ratified. As the UTCC desired to be an ethical and moral example to the cabdriver community, we also included a Code of Conduct for our Steering Committee members to sign. This would give us the legal structure to depose or censure anyone in our Steering Committee who did not hold to the highest standards of ethical behavior.

### Becoming a National Organization—AFL-CIO

Along with defining who could become members of the UTCC as cabdrivers with Chauffeur’s licenses issued by the city of Chicago, we also left the decision of membership open to include suburban drivers, and even limo drivers, in the future, if the membership decided to include them.

In discussions with the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, we also discovered we shared a vision for forming a national union for cabdrivers all across the United States. In 2011, the National Taxi Worker’s Alliance became the 57<sup>th</sup> chartered Union of the AFL-CIO.

*(sidebar) [The New York Taxi Worker’s Alliance had had several offers over the years to join other unions, most notably the Transit Worker’s Union in New York. But they had refused, based on two principles: One, what did other unions know about the life and work of taxi drivers? And Two, they wanted their own union, led by cabdrivers. The UTCC shares this view, that we want our own union, led by cabdrivers. We do not want to join a union of electrical workers, or truck drivers, or steelworkers, or anything else.]*

### History with other Unions in Chicago

Since the UTCC was formed, we have had some encounters with other unions who offered to help us unionize. We had some interest from the United Electrical, representing electrical workers, four years ago. We also met with the Steelworkers Union about the same time. And recently, the Teamsters have also approached us. These are big and rich and powerful unions. We asked them all the same questions: Why do you want to help us? The answer was always the same: if we want their help to unionize, we would have to JOIN their union, and a part of our union dues would have to go to their unions. In addition, we would not have a say in how much those dues would be.



Tracy Abman of AFSCME meeting with UTCC Steering Committee

After considering these offers, the UTCC decided that, knowing our cabdrivers and knowing how little money we had, we decided that we wanted to decide for ourselves what our dues would be, and we wanted our own union, led by cabdrivers, just like New York did. Unfortunately, no matter how much our fellow union brothers claimed they cared about us, when we asked them to help us without a promise of union affiliation with them, they all refused. So much for union brotherhood!

### The UTCC and AFSCME

Two years ago, during the Occupy Chicago movement, several UTCC organizers attend some of their meetings. This is when we met Tracy Abman, an organizer for AFSCME, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, a union for government and public service workers. She expressed an interest in our organizing efforts, and the UTCC invited her to several of our Steering Committee meetings, where she met Bill Burns, a former member of our Steering Committee.

### The UTCC and Melissa Callahan

When the city of Chicago announced two and a half years ago that it was going to revise the city code for the taxi industry, and increase the lease rates, the UTCC held a series of open meetings to organize against this ordinance. We were trying to unite the cabdrivers into our organization, as we knew we would be stronger if we were united. Melissa Callahan attended several of those meetings.

A day or two after the one of the meetings, Melissa Callahan went *on her own* to file her lawsuit against the city of Chicago, challenging our classification as “independent contractors”. She never mentioned one word about it during our meetings. Shortly after that she formed Cabbies For Justice and started soliciting funds to support the lawsuit she had filed. Cabdrivers were told that this lawsuit would be turned into a class-action suit, and cabdrivers could eventually benefit by receiving back pay from the city, and that we may even become city employees if it was successful. As far as the UTCC knows, the cabdriver community has not been polled or consulted about whether we might want to become city employees.

After Melissa Callahan turned her back on the one cabdriver organization we have in Chicago by not asking for our input or support *before* she filed her lawsuit, she got together with Bill Burns and started soliciting support from our allied organizations. Melissa Callahan and Bill Burns so-

lited for funding from the American Friends Service Committee, from our friends and allies the New York taxi union, and also from the local CFL (Chicago Federation of Labor), who are allied with the national AFL-CIO, who is the parent organization of the National Taxi Workers Alliance. They did this without the knowledge of the UTCC Steering Committee.

Eventually, Melissa Callahan and Bill Burns also came to the UTCC and asked for a contribution and logistical support for her lawsuit (help with fundraising). After many meetings and debates, we told her that we would support it logistically if we could have a public display of unity between Cabbies for Justice and the UTCC, but that we did not have any funds to contribute, as we are a small organization with very little money. Melissa refused our offer. To this date, her lawsuit has not been classified as a class-action, and none of our allies have contributed to it, although individual UTCC members have contributed substantially, in a show of solidarity.

The actions that Bill Burns and Melissa Callahan engaged in to go around the UTCC Steering Committee to ask for money from our friends and allies showed a weakness of principle and character. The proper and politically wise thing to do would have been to come to the UTCC to officially ask our support, which they did not do, and still have not done. Along the way, Bill Burns also *allegedly* violated the UTCC Code of Conduct, by not respecting the oath he signed when he joined the Steering Committee. After telling us last year he would attend a meeting to address the alleged violations, we never heard from him again.

### AFSCME attempting to form second union

During this whole campaign, Tracy Abman, from AFSCME, got involved with the Melissa Callahan lawsuit, and got her union to donate \$15,000 to it. At one point, UTCC organizers met with her and Bill Burns, and we asked her point-blank if she was interested in organizing cabdrivers. The UTCC had asked her for support for our unionizing efforts before, but without the promise of affiliation with AFSCME, they did not seem interested. Tracy Abman told us she was not interested in organizing cabdrivers. We doubted her statement, as we felt that her union would not donate \$15,000 to a lawsuit to turn cabdrivers into city employees without wanting something in return.

It turns out we were right. We started hearing about AFSCME holding meetings to “organize cabdrivers” earlier this year. The UTCC is

offended and concerned that this situation will become a source of disunity in the Chicago cabdriver community. We believe we have been organizing cabdrivers for over six years now, we have collected hundreds of members over that time, and we have been effective in both advocating for reforms and in representing cabdrivers' interests. Have we won every battle? No. But we fight like hell with what efforts we can! And all with very little to no resources. Most of us are working cabdrivers, and donating most or all of our time to this unionizing effort. It seems a shame that AFSCME wants to counter-organize another union, as if the UTCC did not exist, or was a failure.

When AFSCME organizers showed up at one of our general meetings to present their case for joining them, we turned them away, as it was not the appropriate place to have that conversation. We held a follow-up meeting with AFSCME organizer Tracy Abman, where she presented the AFSCME plan and we got to ask her some questions.

AFSCME has had some success in organizing cabdrivers in New Orleans, a much smaller market. Out of 1600 cabdrivers in New Orleans, AFSCME claims that more than 800 have joined the AFSCME-affiliated cabdriver union. This is not so unusual. Cabdrivers in Seattle, Washington, and Washington, DC are affiliates of the Teamsters. Cabdrivers in Boston are affiliated with the Steelworkers.

We asked Tracy Abman what the union dues are for the New Orleans drivers. She told us they were \$40 per month. We asked how much of those dues go to AFSCME, and how much stay with the cabdrivers' local. She told us that out of the \$40/month collected, \$12.47 goes to AFSCME national, \$17.80 goes to the AFSCME state council, and \$9.45 stays with the cabdrivers' local organization. This is where we got the percentage-split we published in our literature: roughly 75% of the drivers union dollar goes to AFSCME state and national and 25% stays with the drivers.

When we met with the New York and National Taxi Workers' Alliance (AFL-CIO) we asked them the same questions. They told us that roughly 20% of the Chicago drivers' union dues would go to the National and 80% would stay with the local UTCC.

In determining which offer was the better one, we took into consideration that we Chicago cabdrivers would like to be in our own union, just like New York, and that we like the idea of a National cabdriver union. We believe we are the ones who know our industry best, and we like the idea of **self-determination**. We also believe the Chicago cabdriver gets a better deal with the New York 20-80% split of our union dues.

We once again asked Tracy Abman if AFSCME would assist UTCC in getting organized, and in getting members, without the promise of affiliation with them, and without getting a cut of our union dues. She did not answer the question. We asked her if UTCC was successful in gaining our

1000 minimum members and becoming a sister union of AFSCME, could we count on their support for our new and young and beginning union anyway? She wouldn't answer that question either.

Although the UTCC is saddened and disappointed that AFSCME is going ahead with their plans to form a **second** union of cabdrivers in Chicago, we are not so surprised. The stakes are pretty high. At \$480 per year union dues, and with a potential of 10,000 members, that is a pile of money! That's \$4.8 million dollars, and with their 75% split, AFSCME stands to benefit substantially from the cabdrivers' union dues.

It is also confusing to the Chicago cabdrivers, who are now asked to choose who they want to represent them—AFSCME, who are a public service workers union, or the UTCC and the National, who are a cabdriver-led union. Chicago cabdrivers have been so discouraged by the lack of unity in our workforce, it is a shame that AFSCME is choosing to divide us even more! We have bigger battles to fight than to fight another union for the right to organize in Chicago!

**UTCC and the National Taxi Workers Alliance (AFL-CIO)**

The UTCC is clear, however, in the path we have chosen, and we believe it is the more sensible and honorable and wiser path. Uniting with New York, and the National Taxi Worker's Alliance, and our sisters and brothers behind the wheel all across this country is the right thing to do! We believe in **self-determination**, we believe we know our industry better than any one else, and we believe we can produce the right leadership and analysis for the way forward for dignity, justice and our human and worker's rights.

The UTCC signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the NTLA on April 21<sup>st</sup> of this year. This is an historic document that states our intention of becoming an affiliate of the AFL-CIO by the end of the year. In order to do that, we need a minimum of 1000 new, dues-paying members to sign up and pay those dues. Those dues are currently \$120 per year, and can be paid by check, cash or by credit card. You can come into our office at 2040 N. Milwaukee on Mon-Tues-Wed between 1 and 7 pm, or you can meet us in the field to make your payments. 1000 is the minimum, the maximum is 5-10,000! The more members we have, the stronger we will be!

The benefits we can offer right now are very few. But going forward, your support will help us gain the following—political power to negotiate with the city and affiliations for changes in how we are treated; collective bargaining rights; legal benefits to fight individual cases; a legal fund to assist in bringing reforms at 400 W. Superior and in City ordinances; possibly health, life and death and disability insurance plans, and a strong organization to fight for better treatment. It's a tall order, but **TOGETHER, WE CAN DO IT!**—■

**Uber vs Uber: Workers Struggle Comes to Uber**

BY BIJU MATHEW

**R**ECENTLY, THE CEO OF UBER, TRAVIS Kalanick was quoted saying the following things:

Speaking at the Code Conference in California, Kalanick said that Uber will eventually move away from hiring human drivers to use a fleet of driverless cars.

*"Look, this is the way the world is going... If Uber doesn't go there, it's not going to exist either way," Kalanick said. "The reason Uber could be expensive is because you're not just paying for the car – you're paying for the other dude in the car," Kalanick said. "When there's no other dude in the car, the cost of taking an Uber anywhere becomes cheaper than owning a vehicle."*

The entrepreneurial sensibility has worn thin. Till a few days ago the Uber PR machine was tweeting about how their partners - meaning the drivers—were making over 90k and counting. But the truth came out on Monday June 16th at 1455 Market St., Uber's lavish headquarters in San Francisco.

Over 300 UberX drivers gathered in a militant protest demanding the resignation of Travis Kalanick, Uber's CEO. Drivers were incensed by his reference to "the dude in the front seat" comment when asked why Uber services were costly. "Its insulting," an UberX driver told this reporter. "He is raking in the billions and he is trying to turn the public against us," he added. The air was abuzz with the slogans "Fire Travis Kalanick" and "No Respect, No Work." Driver anger was at a high as incomes have plummeted in recent months. A main demand at the protest was to stop charging the UberX drivers 20%. "Till a few months ago we were paying only 5% and now its 20%. The Uberx meter is much slower than a regular taxi meter. How can we make a living like this?" asked Anwar. "If we let him get away with 20% today, it will be 40% in a few months." Anwar added. Till about a year ago Anwar drove regular taxi in nearby Oakland but was forced to quit as the local taxi company fired him. The third demand at the protest was for comprehensive coverage. "We want our passengers and drivers to be safe" said Reggie, one of the organizers of the protest.

The protest is an indicator of what is coming. Both licensed taxi drivers and UberX drivers are caught between the greed of the traditional taxi fleets and the new RideSteal moguls. Both sets of drivers will have no choice but to take to militant protests. ■



## Lawyer fights for low-wage workers' rights

Continued from Page 3

\$10,000 to buy a franchise, but controlled his accounts and didn't give him enough work to make a living.

Jeffrey Rosin, a Boston lawyer representing Jan-Pro, said Vazquez has no case because he bought his franchise from a California firm that holds regional rights to use the Jan-Pro name but is independent from Jan-Pro Franchising International.

"The facts are being twisted and convoluted to sway public and legislative opinion," Rosin said. "It's not an appropriate case to say that [Liss-Riordan is] vindicating the rights of workers because, from Massachusetts to California, Jan-Pro franchisees are testifying they are running independent, profitable businesses."

The International Franchise Association said these lawsuits are hurting the state's economy. Each new franchise that opens creates an average of 40 jobs, said Dean Heyl, director of state government relations for the association, but businesses have become reluctant to bring those opportunities here.

"This litigation has definitely had a chilling effect on franchises entering Massachusetts," Heyl said.

Class-action lawsuits make up the majority of Lichten & Liss-Riordan's caseload. Class actions are key to making companies obey wage and hour laws, Liss-Riordan said, because the cost of legal awards in cases brought by individual workers rarely affects the bottom line. Multiply that by 1,000, though, and executives start paying attention, she said.

The ability to file class actions has come under fire following a recent US Supreme Court decision that makes it easier for employers to insist on worker arbitration agreements.

Arbitration takes place out of the public scrutiny of courts, with confidential results, so a favorable outcome for one worker can't be used to help another. Cases may have to be filed individually and the worker could be required to share in the legal costs.

Liss-Riordan recently argued against this "privatization of justice" before the state Supreme Judicial Court. She told the justices her client should be allowed to bring a class-action suit against System4 Commercial Cleaning, regardless of the company's arbitration-only agreement.

If the SJC rules in her favor, it could set a precedent for other states to find limitations in the Supreme Court decision. But a loss would reinforce the federal ruling, a major setback for practices like hers.

Already, a 2004 Coverall arbitration agreement has kept a group of workers from being a part of her class-action case. In response, her firm filed 100 individual arbitration claims, and forced the company to foot the bill.

Preserving the ability to file class-action lawsuits is vital, said Michael Harper, a Boston Uni-

versity law school professor, because workers need high-powered lawyers to take on big companies, and lawyers need a big group of plaintiffs to make it worth their while.

"The little people don't often have claims that without a class action would be worth pursuing," Harper said.

Indeed, Liss-Riordan's firm gets a third of the money its clients are awarded.

Nicholas Carter, a Boston attorney who has argued several tips cases against Liss-Riordan, said her firm is taking advantage of a restrictive state law that doesn't allow even a low-paid fast food shift manager to share money left in the tip jar.

"The plaintiff's bar is chasing the money and is not protecting the rights of the employees," Carter said.

The lawyers at Lichten & Liss-Riordan get paid only when they win. A \$325,000 ruling — and five years of work — on behalf of American Airlines skycaps who claimed they were cheated out of tips was wiped out on appeal. The firm has yet to see a dime of the \$3 million judgment against Coverall because it's tied up in appeals.

Liss-Riordan likes to get creative to help the workers she represents.

Last week at an auction selling off 10 Upper Crust locations, she and a co-investor bought the restaurant lease and equipment in Harvard Square. She plans to give employees ownership shares in the restaurant, and is considering naming it The Just Crust.

She also dreams of starting a worker-owned cleaning firm.

"It excites me to try to put the pieces of the puzzle together to create new ways to support workers and give them a leg up in the tug of war between workers and corporations," she said.

Liss-Riordan is not shy about seeking out media coverage, which alerts other workers about their rights — and attracts new clients. But press coverage can complicate a case, some lawyers say, prompting companies to fight harder and lobby politicians to change the law in their favor.

The way Liss-Riordan sees it, the more awareness the better. Her firm has cases pending in 10 states — a number of which cover workers nationally — and she frequently hears from lawyers around the country. A California attorney who contacted her for advice on tips cases, for instance, went on to win a \$100 million judgment against Starbucks in 2008.

As these cases spread, Liss-Riordan hopes unscrupulous companies will change their ways, and that workers who fought back will pave the way for others to be treated fairly.

"For years, many employers have operated their businesses thinking they held the entire deck of cards," said Philip Gordon, president of the Massachusetts Employment Lawyers Association.

"Thanks to lawyers like Shannon, many of those employers are straightening out their act, and many employees who have suffered years of pay theft are finally getting their due.

"Talk about a legacy," he said. ■

## CHICAGO CABDRIVERS! Be alert and aware where and how you are driving! Here are the locations of: **Speeding Camera Locations throughout Chicago**

- Abbott Park, 49 E. 95th St.
- Bogan Tech High School, 3939 W. 79th St.
- Burr Elementary School, 1621 W. Wabansia Ave.
- Challenger Park, 1100 W. Irving Park Rd.
- Chicago Agricultural High School, 3807 W. 111th St.
- Christopher Elementary School, 5042 S. Artesian Ave.
- Columbus Park, 500 S. Central Ave.
- Curie High School, 4959 S. Archer Ave.
- Douglas Park, 1401 S. Sacramento Ave.
- Frances Xavier Warde School, 751 N. State St.
- Gage Park, 2415 W. 55th St.
- Garfield Park, 100 N. Central Park Dr.
- Gompers Park, 4222 W. Foster Ave.
- Hancock Elementary School, 4034 W. 56th St.
- Harvard Elementary School, 7525 S. Harvard Ave.
- Horan Park, 3035 W. Van Buren St.
- Horner Park, 2741 W. Montrose Ave.
- Humboldt Park, 1400 N. Humboldt Dr.
- Icci Academy, 6435 W. Belmont Ave.
- Jefferson Park, 4822 N. Long Ave.
- Jones High School, 606 S. State St.
- Lane Tech High School, 2501 W. Addison St.
- Legion Park, 3100 W. Bryn Mawr Ave.
- Lorca Elementary School, 3231 N. Springfield Ave.
- Major Taylor Park, 970 W. 115th St.
- Marquette Park, 6734 S. Kedzie Ave.
- McGuane Park, 2901 S. Poplar Ave.
- McKinley Park, 2210 W. Pershing Rd.
- Merrimac Park, 6343 W. Irving Park Rd.
- Morgan Park High School, 1744 W. Pryor Ave.
- Ogden Park, 429 N. Columbus Dr.
- Orr High School, 730 N. Pulaski Rd.
- Park 499, 3925 E. 104th St.
- Parsons Park, 4701 W. Belmont Ave.
- Pickard Elementary School, 2301 W. 21st Pl.
- Portage Park, 4100 N. Long Ave.
- Prosser Vocational High School, 2148 N. Long Ave.
- Riis Park, 6100 W. Fullerton Ave.
- Roberto Clemente High School, 1147 N. Western Ave.
- Rosenblum Park, 2000 E. 75th St.
- Sauganash Elementary School, 6040 N. Kilpatrick Ave.
- Schaefer Park, 2415 N. Marshfield Ave.
- Senn Park, 5887 N. Ridge Ave.
- Sherman Park, 1307 W. 52nd St.
- St. Genevieve School, 4854 W. Montana St.
- St. Rita High School, 7740 S. Western Ave.
- Union Park, 1501 W. Randolph St.
- Warren Elementary School, 9239 S. Jeffery Ave.
- Washington Park, 5531 S. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr.
- Welles Park, 2333 W. Sunnyside Ave.
- Broadway and Sunnyside (Target)

**GET INVOLVED IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST UNJUST FEES & TAXES!**

**Join the fight for rights, respect & human dignity!**

**CALL UTCC: 773-342-8822**

## Chicago Cabdrivers File Lawsuit

Continued from Page 3

nies and their owners. In another case filed by taxi driver Mellissa Callahan, the complaint is against the City of Chicago. Instead of suing the city, we have brought claims against the cab companies because we believe they are the ones that should be held responsible for wage violations and should be required to follow the rules that employers must follow with their employees. We also know the companies are reaping enormous profits off of this system of classifying drivers as independent contractors. The Callahan vs. City of Chicago has not been certified as a class-action lawsuit as of this date.

### Shannon's Story

I am a workers' rights lawyer and have spent the last decade battling companies in a number of industries that have misclassified workers as independent contractors. In all of these industries, the companies have made enormous profits by ignoring employee wage protections and requiring employees to take all the risks and pay all the expenses required to do their jobs. I have won cases involving this type of scheme in the cleaning industry (against companies that have sold cleaning "franchises" for thousands of dollars to cleaning workers), in the trucking industry (including a case against FedEx Ground, which classifies its delivery drivers as independent contractors, and makes them pay for their own trucks and fuel, and does not pro-

vide them wage protections), and in the adult entertainment industry (where strip clubs charge dancers for the right to work). In a case I won against a cleaning company that charged workers for cleaning jobs, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court held that it is illegal for a company to sell a job to a worker. Our goal in this Chicago taxi case is to expand that ruling to Illinois, and convince the courts here that selling jobs to taxi drivers violates the Illinois wage laws as well.

From my work representing taxi drivers in the lawsuit in Boston, I met Fayez Khozindar and Peter Ali Enger from the UTCC, and we discussed bringing a similar suit challenging Chicago taxi companies for misclassifying drivers as independent contractors and committing wage violations. Based on a study from the University of Chicago, taxi drivers in Chicago regularly make less than minimum wage from fares and tips, while working extremely long hours. Meanwhile, RideShare companies like UberX, Lyft and Sidecar are taking away business from taxis, and it is the drivers who are suffering from this new competition, rather than the owners of the taxi companies. Under a system where taxi drivers are properly treated as employees, drivers would be guaranteed a fair wage and not be required to pay for the right to do their jobs.

The lawsuit may take some time to reach a final result. Cases like this often take several years. But our hope is that, through this lawsuit, we can change the gross injustice facing Chicago taxi drivers every day. A fair day's work deserves a fair day's pay. ■

## PLEASE SUPPORT OUR LOCAL SPONSORS



## Round 1 Ends With Mixed Results

Continued from Page 5

companies are exploiting--to fill the perceived need on the streets, and the fact that the city of Chicago is notoriously lazy about enforcing even the rules against limos and suburban taxis working on our streets. They seem only interested in enforcing rules against the hard-working Chicago chauffeur's license holders--the cabdrivers.

And Ahmed is right that in the short run, UberX is an option that is available to drivers to get out of the clutches of the greedy fleet owners. So far, so good. The problem is the end game. In the end, for UberX to survive it needs professional taxi drivers to work. Part-timers will never create a stable market. And so today, UberX is offering Chicago cabdrivers all sorts of incentives to switch. But once the old taxi industry is destroyed, guess what? UberX is going to be just as exploitative as the greedy bosses and we won't have anywhere to run to in order to complain, or to seek justice. There are no regulations that apply to how UberX does business. No limit on fees they can charge drivers ("data plan" fees, "processing" fees, etc...). No limit on percentage of fares they keep for themselves. No limit on how many UberX drivers they hire. No appeal process for when and why they "fire" drivers from their system. And Chicago regulators (DBACP, the police, etc.) don't even do a decent job of regulating the taxi industry when they DO have regulations.

So, instead of wasting the current situation by only looking at short term goals, we need to see this as an opportunity to get regulations that are favorable to drivers passed in the city of Chicago -- so that two years from now we have *more protections*, a *higher income* and *safety and security* on the job. The fleet bosses need us. Let's get something out of them. The more aggressive UberX is, the more the crisis and ev-

ery turn in the crisis is an opportunity for us to get something for ourselves.

Mark Gruberg is a veteran San Francisco driver and one of the leaders of the SFTDA. "Two weeks ago, a fleet returned 40 medallions to the city," he reported during a coordination call with the National Taxi Workers Alliance, the AFL-CIO's taxi union working across the US. "What we have is a mess and the mess is only getting messier," Gruberg continued, "we have 1900 medallions and over 4000 active licensed taxi drivers. Drivers have taken a 25% to 30% drop in income." Gruberg estimates that in any given time period over 3000 RideSteal cars enter and leave the streets. UberX drivers' incomes have collapsed just as fast as those of taxi drivers as transport-for-hire cars flood the streets. But an emerging alliance of taxi drivers from across California will seek to alter the balance in the next few weeks.

Similar battles are unfolding in other cities. In Austin, TX the TAXI drivers Association of Austin, a National Taxi Workers Alliance affiliate, has secured a joint negotiation on job security and income stability as the city considers a RideSteal pilot program. This puts them in a strong position to negotiate a victory for drivers.

So also, in Houston, TX, the United Houstonian Taxi Drivers Association (UHTDA) beat back an UberX offensive as over 500 of the city's 2500 drivers gathered at City Hall and forced the Council to reaffirm the rule that Uber and Company can operate so long as they meet two requirements: (a) a two hour prearrangement (for dispatched calls) and (b) a \$70 minimum fare. In other words, Uber and other companies are being pushed into the limousine sector in Houston.

In Boston, drivers demonstrated outside the Uber offices and in Montgomery county outside Washington, DC drivers refused to join a taxi caravan against Uber organized by Barwood, the largest garage in the county, and instead have opened up direct negotiations with the County Executives office. ■

In Philadelphia, the Taxi Workers Alliance of PA is all set to launch a driver-run taxi dispatch cooperative that will seek to be the solution to and the competition against the RideSteal companies. These battles - from Chicago to San Francisco and from Austin to Boston, will reshape the taxi industry as a whole and what will emerge will depend on the local and national power drivers build.

Local power means only one thing for us as drivers. A strong and militant union that sees the UberX fight as an *opportunity* and seeks to build a drivers' victory. In Austin, a strong union has meant drivers are directly negotiating with the city. In Montgomery, the same is true. In Philadelphia and New York, the Alliance is consistently present in all negotiations. In Chicago it is the responsibility of all drivers to build UTCC into a powerful voice and the only way to do it is by becoming a member of UTCC today.

At the national level, the National Taxi Workers Alliance has already built a network to strategize and help each local union. In the next few weeks the NTLWA will play a key role in uniting all California taxi unions. Before the summer is out NTLWA will have produced the most comprehensive reports on the impact of RideSteal, drawing on data from all the cities mentioned above--and more. Every action of NTLWA will build local power, but for NTLWA to be powerful, each city will have to build its membership to the next level. Chicago signed the historic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with NTLWA in May of this year. Now it is crucial that Chicago become an affiliate in a matter of months. That way NTLWA will be able to put more resources into the Chicago fight!

Build your local. Build your National. There has never been a better time and opportunity to grow and develop **DRIVER POWER** to have a voice and a say in the decisions that are being made about our work and our lives! There is no better way to fight this fight! ■

## Taxi and rail strikes hit European cities

*Transport in major European cities has been disrupted by strikes affecting taxis and rail services.*

REPRINTED VIA THE BBC

**T**AXI DRIVERS BLOCKED ROADS IN PARIS, Madrid, London, Milan, Berlin and other cities in protest against the rise of services booked using smartphone apps.

They say there has been a lack of regulation concerning rival mobile service Uber.

Travellers in France were also hit by a rail strike that stopped two-thirds of trains in some areas.

The biggest taxi associations in the Spanish capital asked their drivers to observe a 24-hour stoppage until 06:00 on Thursday. More than 15,000 licensed vehicles operate in Madrid, Spanish media say.

No taxis were visible at Barajas airport or Atocha station, reports said, despite Uber not yet being available in the capital. At one point, a car suspected of being a private taxi came under attack from demonstrators.

The strike was also observed in Barcelona, where the mobile app is in operation.

### Trafalgar Square

Drivers of London's famous black cabs demonstrated in Trafalgar Square, arguing that the Uber mobile app, which originated in the US, was tantamount to a taxi meter, which only black cabs are legally entitled to use in London.

"We're governed by a set of rules and they don't seem to apply to Uber," said Glenn Chapman, a driver parked in a long line of cabs outside Downing Street.

Uber argues it is complying with local regu-



*These cab drivers massed outside the Olympic stadium in Berlin*

lations.

Transport for London estimated that about 4,000 drivers had taken part and roads were gridlocked around Parliament Square, Whitehall and Trafalgar Square.

In Milan, in northern Italy, a protest took place throughout Wednesday, although disruption was not on the same scale as elsewhere, with boycotts of key sites such as railway stations and squares. Cab drivers also staged demonstrations in Rome and Naples.

Protests also took place in several German cities, including Berlin and Hamburg.

But the worst of the disruption was in Paris, where train services were also badly affected



*During a 24-hour protest in Madrid, cab drivers surrounded a car suspected of being a private taxi*

by strike action.

Hundreds of drivers blocked the French capital's airports and staged a "go-slow" during the morning rush hour.

Only one in three trains was running in the Paris region, although Eurostar services were unaffected.

Unions are objecting to plans to merge the rail network operator with the train company SNCF. The company said some 28% of railway staff had walked out.

The strike is due to continue until Thursday evening, unless union representatives and the transport minister reach an agreement in talks late on Wednesday. ■

## London's black-cab drivers confront Hailo app as tensions rise over taxi licence bid

*Transport in major European cities has been disrupted by strikes affecting taxis and rail services.*

BY MARK BLUNDEN REPRINTED VIA THE LONDON EVENING STANDARD

**T**ENSIONS BETWEEN LONDON'S BLACK-cab drivers and taxi app Hailo led to a confrontation at the firm's office.

Cab drivers are angry that Hailo bosses have applied to Transport for London for a private hire licence — the same as minicabs use — and say they feel "betrayed" by the firm.

Up to five men believed to be taxi drivers confronted staff, Hailo said.

Graffiti saying "Judas" was later seen daubed on the wall outside the Southwark office on Tuesday.

A driver who was at the offices said the "Judas" graffiti was already on the wall when they arrived.

The man, who asked not to be named, said a "discussion" involving up to 10 drivers happened outside.

He said: "The discussion was about why Hailo were doing this... it feels like they've sold us down the river."

"One of the staff asked for our badge numbers and then said he was going to call the police."

"Two officers turned up and asked why they had been called. When it was explained to them that there was no reason for them to be there



*Tensions: Hailo allows users to hail a taxi through their smartphone*

and there was no animosity they went away."

Hailo said black-cab drivers must "move with the times" in the face of new competition from app-based taxi firms such as Uber.

A Hailo spokesman said: "Four or five guys came in to the office and were boisterous. We said, 'Would you mind calming down please' and asked if they were cabbies, but they didn't answer. Someone called the police, everyone

calmed down and that was it."

Steve McNamara, general secretary of the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association, said: "Feelings are running very high. When Hailo launched to the taxi trade their marketing sold it to cab drivers as taking back the work from private hire vehicles and the minicab industry. Now Hailo have joined them."

Hailo was founded in 2010 by three black-cab drivers and three technology entrepreneurs. It allows Londoners to hail a taxi through their smartphone.

Limousines and a pre-booking option are among services Hailo could offer under a new licence. It is understood that Hailo hopes to receive a decision from TfL within weeks.

Grant Davis, chairman of the London Cab Drivers Club, said: "Cabbies have embraced technology... but we want to work for an app that is just for taxis."

Hailo chairman Ron Zeghibe denied the company had gone back on its word, saying: "Taxis will always be front and centre of Hailo."

In an open letter, he said: "There is no point burying our heads in the sand." ■

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# The Work and Lives of Chicago's Taxi Drivers: Every Driver Has a Story

BY TRACY LUEDKE, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY, NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**M**Y NAME IS TRACY LUEDKE, OF Northeastern Illinois University here in Chicago. I am a professor of cultural anthropology. As a cultural anthropologist, I am interested in all the people of the world and their ideas, activities, experiences, and relationships. I became interested in the lives and working conditions of Chicago taxi drivers when I met Peter Ali Enger, who was a student at Northeastern. Peter has been a cabdriver for eight years and was one of the founding members of UTCC (United Taxidriers Community Council).

The work of taxi drivers is very important to the transportation systems of all the major cities in the world, and cabdrivers' work lives are good examples of labor conditions in a globalized workforce. However, taxi drivers' experiences, opinions, and knowledge are usually hidden—the public does not know anything about what it is like to drive a taxi: the long hours, the difficulties of dealing with the taxi companies, the rules and regulations they have to follow, no health insurance, no vacation or sick pay, stress and increasing expenses, as well as the deep knowledge of the city, the interesting conversations with visitors from all over the world, and the skill it takes to be an effective driver. In addition, there have been many recent changes in



Prof. Tracy Luedke and UTCC Organizer Peter Ali Enger

the industry with the arrival of rideshare services, changes in taxi ridership resulting from a weak economy, and new policies enacted by the city. These issues are rarely studied from the

perspective of drivers. Peter and I have been working on a research project that we hope will allow us to capture this information and these experiences. We plan to document the everyday lives of drivers, both in the work they do in their individual careers and when they come together as a community of workers.

Interviewing drivers about their experiences in the taxi industry is a central part of our research activities. We welcome the participation of a wide range of drivers with different experiences. Participation is entirely voluntary and we will schedule interviews when it is easy for the drivers. We will work around YOUR schedule.

The goal of this project is to produce a book that will be useful to all of the people, drivers and others, who are involved. We hope it will be useful to drivers themselves, as a record of their work. We hope it will also be useful in ongoing efforts to organize drivers and defend drivers' rights. And we hope it will be useful to other individuals and organizations who work in support of human rights for the global workforce. Finally, we hope it will help to positively change public opinions of taxi drivers, by giving a voice to their stories and humanizing their struggles. Please feel free to get in touch with any questions: t-luedke@neiu.edu. ■

## UPDATE ON UTCC ACTIVITIES



Earlier this year, the UTCC collected over 1000 signatures making the case for increasing the pay of cabdrivers in Chicago. We have not had a fare increase in 9 years now, and cabdrivers work on average for less than minimum wage! We submitted the 1000 plus petition signatures to the Mayor's office on April 21<sup>st</sup>.



The UTCC would like to thank Globe Taxi for their support of our membership drive. This is a truly principled progressive stance they are taking, and forward-thinking. It is in everyone's interest for Chicago cabdrivers to have a union to advocate for fairness, just treatment, dignity and safe and legal working conditions. We would like to encourage other Taxi Affiliations to take the same stand.

## JOIN UTCC TO REACH 1,000 DUES-PAYING MEMBERS

And make Chicago the next affiliate of the National Taxi Workers Alliance (AFL-CIO): 17,000 members in New York alone! The taxi companies have a national association. The regulators like BACP have a national association. Taxi Drivers have the National Taxi Workers Alliance with UTCC as Chicago's voice!!!

### UTCC RECOVERS \$27,000 To Drivers Overcharged on Leases!

After more than a year long mobilization, in 2013 UTCC has won over \$27000 in settlements on lease overcharge cases. Several taxi companies including Dispatch and Carriage have been forced to return money to drivers!! UTCC is confident of winning every case that it gets!!! Bring your case today! We will recover your money!

### UTCC UNCOVERS TAXI COMPANY PARKING TICKETS SCAM

UTCC has tracked a scam by garages who put thousands of dollars of unpaid parking tickets on drivers going back many years. Investigation/ solution is in process. CONTACT UTCC if you have this problem.

### Current Benefits of UTCC

- Bond Card with first \$20 payment
- Legal Assistance at 400 W. Superior
  - \$10 co-pay for getting the best deal
  - \$60 discount on representation at Hearings
- Consultation on lease fraud and other driver issues

### Instructions for membership:

- Fill out form below
- Bring to our office at 2040 N. Milwaukee to make a payment and get your picture taken for your Membership card
- Payment is \$120 per year (partial payment plans available)
- Office hours: Mon-Tues-Wed 1-7 pm
- Or call for appointment: 773-342-8822

## JOIN NOW!

NAME: (print) \_\_\_\_\_ GENDER: MALE/FEMALE

CHAUFFEUR LIC. #: \_\_\_\_\_ Lease Driver: Yes No Shift: Day Night Mix/Swing

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Ph.: \_\_\_\_\_ Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Yearly Membership: \$120 (partial OK)

Payment type: cash/credit/money order/check Amount received: \_\_\_\_\_ Due: \_\_\_\_\_ (within 6 weeks)

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