





# Reflections on UTCC's First Year in the Struggle for Justice



By Faye Khozindar,  
UTCC  
Chair

When I heard some drivers were receiving tickets at the O'Hare parking lot while they were praying in the shelter, I knew I had to do something about it, especially I after I received such a ticket. I went home and I wrote a few lines in the form of a petition to protest such action by the Aviation Officers at O'Hare. In the following two weeks, I collected 1,400 signatures and I submitted them to the Commissioner of Aviation during a meeting with city officials at O'Hare.

After weeks of proposals from us and counterproposals from O'Hare officials to decide where and how the cab drivers could park freely without the threat of receiving tickets or blocking the flow of traffic to the terminals, we reached an agreement. I sent a thank-you letter to the Commissioner of Aviation, Mr. Rodriguez, and he mailed me back a response thanking me for the open channels between the officials at O'Hare and the taxi drivers.

In the aftermath of this success, I realized that, through organizations and negotiations, we could reach a constructive solution with the city of Chicago. Therefore, when the American Friends Service Committee called for a meeting of activ-

ists, where the AFSC unveiled its desire to help organize the taxi drivers to establish their first democratic organization, I decided to attend that meeting. I was selected by the participants to be the interim chairman of the United Taxidrivers Community Council (UTCC).

Our name says it all. We are an inclusive organization and our Steering Committee includes all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds. All are welcome to be under

*It is a historic era when taxi drivers can rise up and decide that they have had enough abuse and maltreatment, and the drivers can have their own representation, and they can have a seat at the table to negotiate the rules and laws that affect their jobs and their fares, and subsequently, their lives.*

this umbrella because this movement is our hope and our call, because we are a social organization.

I was a member of a delegation to Senator Durbin to protest the maltreatment of Indian workers at the Signal International Shipyard in the Gulf Coast.

I was invited to speak on the Rainbow/PUSH TV program and took part in a film screening in the Chicago Cultural Center of downtown Chicago. UTCC took an active part in defending Stanley Shen, when he was brutally beaten and pressured law enforce-

ment to implement the newly passed law that makes battery of an on-duty taxi driver a Class 3 Felony punishable by up to five years in prison.

We printed this on safety placards and distributed and distributed them to taxi drivers.

Equally important was UTCC support for the Republic Windows factory workers and their struggle to win their benefits from the factory owner. We provided them with free transportation to and

from the factory and the rally downtown.

Both the success and leadership of the UTCC have attracted the public, the media, and academia, such as the University of Illinois School of Labor and Employment Relations, where Dr. Robert Bruno conducted his comprehensive study last summer, which will be published soon.

It is the first such study in the history of the Chicago taxi industry. In addition, Dr. Tracy Ludke and Peter Enger of the Northeastern University Anthropology department are currently engaging in a

qualitative study of the drivers, which, again, has never been done before in the city of Chicago.

This historic role of the United Taxidrivers Community Council cannot be ignored. To help reach our potential members, and to make our voice, loud and clear, heard by the public and to the members, we published the *UTCC Voice*, a monthly newsletter. In addition, I was a guest on three radio programs and other members participated in many radio programs to voice our concerns to the public.

Therefore, we think that the city of Chicago now has a potential and very important partner and the UTCC deserves a seat at the table, whether the big companies and the affiliations like it or not.

To those who have doubts about the UTCC's future and success and for those who put obstacles in the way of uniting the taxi drivers—whether for political or personal, selfish reasons—we remind them all of this saying: "The caravan is passing through, while the dogs are barking," because we believe that the UTCC will prevail.

It is a historic era when taxi drivers can rise up and decide that they have had enough abuse and maltreatment, and the drivers can have their own representation, and they can have a seat at the table to negotiate the rules and laws that affect their jobs and their fares, and subsequently, their lives.

## UTCC VOICE UNITED TAXIDRIVERS COMMUNITY COUNCIL

### 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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# Cabdrivers "near the margins of economic failure"

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The taxi industry in Chicago is a 'sweatshop on wheels', says Michael McConnell, regional director of Quaker-based human rights group American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). AFSC commissioned the study and played a key role by conducting 927 in depth surveys (representing nearly 10% of Chicago cabdrivers) at random at O'Hare airport's taxi staging area in the summer of 2008.

"Driven Into Poverty" is the first study of its kind conducted with Chicago cabdrivers, and on Thursday, March 26, UIUC-CLER presented the first part of a four part series to the media, city officials, and the public. The first portion of "Driven Into Poverty" deals with cabdriver income, while the three other parts deal with workplace violence, leasing issues and interactions with law enforcement.

"Over one hundred years ago, workers fought and died for the right to an 8-hour workday," says Fayez Khozindar, chair of cabdriver group United

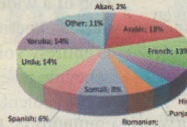
Taxidrivers Community Council. "How much longer until we no longer have to drive 13-hours a day at below minimum wage?"



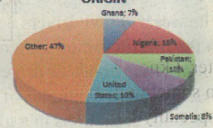
Fayez Khozindar addresses the media in regards to the findings of "Driven Into Poverty" study

# UIUC Study: Driven Into Poverty Part 1: Income Report Executive Summary

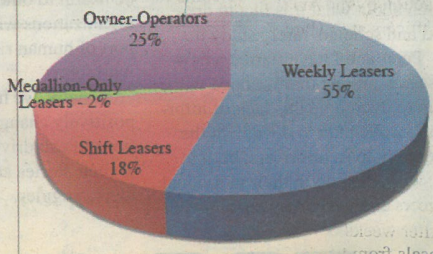
CHICAGO CABDRIVERS: 100 LANGUAGES SPOKEN



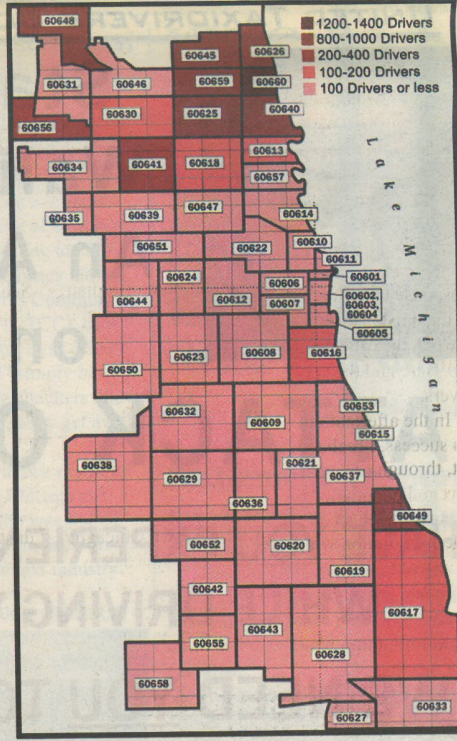
OVER 76 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN



TAXI DRIVER BUSINESS MODELS



WHERE DO CABDRIVERS LIVE?



This baseline study sampled 711 of the approximately 10,500 licensed taxicab drivers in Chicago. The findings were consistent among all demographic groups: race, gender, religion, country of origin, age, tenure, and residential zip code. The following table summarizes the expenses and income of Chicago taxicab drivers as a whole.

| Chicago Taxicab Drivers Income Summary Table          |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| Expense Item  | Average Monthly Cost |
| Fuel  | \$1,459.99           |
| General Upkeep  | \$88.61              |
| Airport Taxes   | \$171.24             |
| Insurance Deductible Fees                             | \$53.71              |
| Monthly Business Model Specific Expenses <sup>1</sup> | \$1,864.29           |
| Total Annual Expenses                                 | \$42,402.96          |
| Gross Annual Income                                   | \$54,723.92          |
| Net Annual Income                                     | \$12,320.95          |
| Hours per Shift                                       | 13.05                |
| Shifts per Month                                      | 25                   |
| Hourly Income   | \$4.38               |

**Taxicab drivers earn \$12,320.95 in net annual income.**

When asked for their "total gross income... from driving that taxicab, including both tips and fares," taxicab drivers responses averaged \$54,723.92 annually. This results in drivers averaging \$12,320.95 in net annual income

**The average shift is more than 13 hours.**

Chicago taxicab drivers as a group averaged 13.05 hours per shift including 5.06 percent of all drivers working 8 hours or less per shift and 74.54 percent working 12 hours or more per shift. On average, drivers as a group invested 324.04 working hours per month. That works out to more than one and half fulltime jobs.

**Taxicab drivers work 25 shifts per month.**

Drivers work 25 out of 30 days on average, i.e., drivers work approximately 6 days a week.

**Taxicab drivers earn \$4.38 per hour.**

Chicago taxicab drivers earn \$4.38, well below both the state (\$7.75 per hour) and federal (\$6.55 per hour) minimum wage.<sup>2</sup> Low hourly income is likely the root cause of drivers working long shifts.

**The Next Step**

The authors of this report are currently working on a second report, focused on taxicab vehicle leasing. We also intend to release a third and fourth report on violence on drivers and driver interaction with law enforcement.

**Taxicab drivers spend \$42,402.96 annually.** By adding the average annual cost of fuel, general upkeep, airport taxes, car insurance and expenses related to leasing or owning the vehicle, we calculate that drivers spend \$42,402.96 annually.

<sup>1</sup> Chicago taxicab drivers are divided into 4 business models, i.e., those that lease their cab weekly, those that lease daily, those who own their vehicles, and those who lease the medallion. Each model incurs different monthly expenses.

<sup>2</sup> Federal and State minimum wage rates can be found at the US Department of Labor website: <http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/wages/minimumwage.htm>

To learn more about *Driven Into Poverty*, a Comprehensive Study of the Chicago Taxicab Industry, Report 1: Income contact Associate Professor Robert Bruno at the Labor Education Program at (312) 996-2491 or [bbruno@illinois.edu](mailto:bbruno@illinois.edu).

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## Documenting the work & lives of Chicago cabdrivers

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in the lives and working conditions of Chicago taxi drivers through my contact and communications with one of my students, Peter Ali Enger, who is the Secretary of the UTCC and who has been a student at Northeastern for the past seven years.

I was also asked to serve on the Board of Directors of the UTCC last year, and I happily accepted. The work of taxi drivers is central to the transportation systems of major urban areas, & drivers' work lives are good examples of present-day labor conditions in a globalized world.

However, taxi drivers' experiences are often hidden—the general public typically does not know much about what it is like to drive a taxi and scholars rarely study it.

Peter and I have started a new research project that we hope will help to overcome this lack of information. We plan to document the everyday lives of drivers, both in the work they do in their individual careers and when they come togeth-

er as a community.

Interviewing drivers about their experiences in the taxi industry will be a central part of our research activities. We welcome the participation of a wide range of drivers with varied experiences. Participation is entirely voluntary and we will schedule research activities when it is convenient for participants.

The goal of the project is to produce a book that will be useful to those involved. We hope it will be useful to drivers themselves, as a record of their work.

We hope it will also be useful to UTCC in their ongoing efforts to organize drivers and to 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 perceptions of cab drivers, by giving voice to their stories and humanizing their struggles.

## Another cabdriver brutally attacked

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according to the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (DBACP), has once again brought to light the growing number of violent crimes against cabdrivers.

Mr. Ziada was working late one night and pulled over for what he thought were customers who attacked him resulting in a fracture. One of the attackers was arrested and charged with a misdemeanor while the other attacker still remains at large. Illinois statute states that "Battery of an on-duty taxi driver is a Class 3 felony, punishable by up to 5 years imprisonment" (720 ILCS 5/12, 730 ILCS 5/5-8-1).

The UTCC has re-launched its driver safety campaign after the attack on Mr. Ziada and has resolved to ensure driver safety. One of the demands that

the group has put forth is for the State's Attorney's Office to upgrade the charges against Mr. Ziada's attackers to a felony.

The group is engaging in meetings with City Council members to find methods to decrease violent crimes against cabdrivers in their respective wards. It is also calling on City of Chicago Aldermen to sign the "Not in My Ward" pledge where the Aldermen commit to eliminating violence against drivers in their areas.

UTCC is also calling on all cabdrivers who are survivors of violent crimes, know individuals who have been attacked or are personally affected by it to step forward and speak out against crimes that have taken the lives so many drivers.



# UTCC

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UNITED TAXIDRIVERS COMMUNITY COUNCIL



## Stand with Walid Ziada! An Attack on one is an

# ATTACK ON ALL!

**HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE  
WHILE DRIVING YOUR TAXI?**

**WE NEED YOU TO STAND UP!  
End the SILENCE & end the VIOLENCE!**

**Tell us your story & join our movement  
773-774-UTCC**

## Shen Settlement

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bit for breaking Stanley's nose and leaving him with 12 stitches that were taken in his face.

That payment was made from Gniadek's own pocket, not from insurance funds. The payment was consideration for a purchase of peace in the civil lawsuit filed on Stanley's behalf in the Law Division of the Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois.

And there are funds enough so as to repay all of the many who volunteered donations to finance the court costs to initiate that lawsuit; Stanley has instructed me to see to it that every dime is repaid.

In addition funds have been offered by the workers compensation insurance company for Stanley's cab lessor that roughly double the amount being paid by Gniadek.

Subject to the approval of the Illinois Workers Compensation Commission, payment will have been made so as to compensate Stanley for the damage done that he'll have to look at every time he shaves for the rest of his life.

The moral of the story is that the rights available to cab drivers in Chicago are extensive and need to be taken advantage of rather than passed for fear of being crushed by the system or ignored.

It wasn't me in particular who achieved anything so unique. Any decent lawyer helping someone like Stanley could do the same, maybe better.

The hope I have is that the lesson is going to have been learned by thousands of drivers. That can only happen if people like you spread the word. Would that you will do so.