

WORKERS GOVERNING TECHNOLOGIES



SHARED LEARNING
ACROSS CONTEXTS

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Funding
The Workers Governing Technologies workshop was co-funded by the SSHRC Connection Program, the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC), the Creative Labour and Critical Futures project (CLCF/ UTSC), the Brazilian Institute of Science and Technology / Informational Sovereignty and Disputes (INCT/DSI), the Institute for Inclusive Economies and Sustainable Livelihoods (IIESL/ UTSC), the Centre for Learning, Social Economy & Work at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (CLSEW/ OISE/UofT), the Knowledge Media Design Institute (KMDI/ UofT) and Data Privacy Brasil Research.



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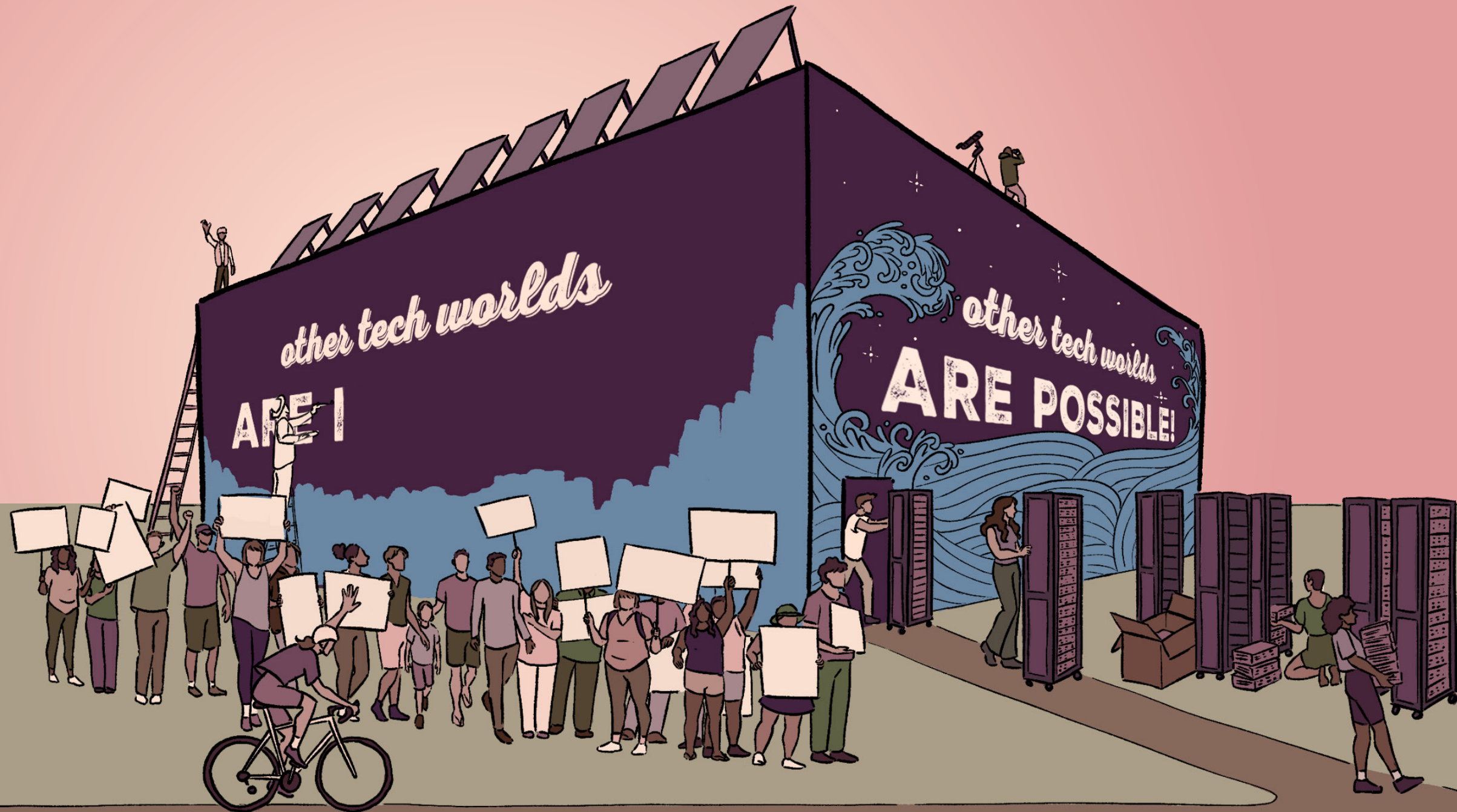


WELCOME!

Over two days during Toronto's stunning fall, the Workers Governing Technologies workshop brought together 20 people from Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Spain, Canada, and the United States, from a range of contexts and backgrounds, to take up the following question: in what ways can workers govern technologies, such as platforms, artificial intelligence, and data?

Whether through collective bargaining, co-op formation, or policy reform, we learned together about different possibilities for collective strategies. We were reminded of the importance of acting collectively and transnationally. We met artists, tech workers, delivery workers, academic workers, and organizers, each bringing different frameworks, challenges, and possibilities to our central question.

This pluriversity—why reduce everything to a single world?—was the basis for the word repeated most often during and after our workshop: energy. "We feel more energized." It was a reminder that moving together also gives us strength. Here is a glimpse of what we discussed and learned during the Workers Governing Technologies workshop.





Katie Tibaldi

Writers Guild of America & WGA Strike Unite

"Much has stayed with me from this event, but energized is the one word that most immediately comes to mind after attending. Things are so challenging in the world right now in so many ways at once for workers, and certainly in the entertainment industry, between mass consolidations, mergers, rollbacks on inclusion and equity, AI, fighting for fair pay, healthcare, the existence and protections of unions, and the corporate tech takeover just to name a few. Events like this remind us all of what is possible when we work together and get creative to create the change we need and want to see happen worldwide."

Neal McDougall

Writers Guild of Canada

"The American publishing industry is more market-driven than the Canadian one. In Canada, our industry wouldn't exist without cultural support policies. It's an ongoing dialogue. It takes time to move the government from 'not interested' to 'invested. Bargaining rights themselves are a function of public policy. The rights that exist wouldn't exist without government action. For this, we have to understand the structure of the sector, the structure of the cultural policy that's involved. We have to communicate between screenwriters who are looking to advance their career and their interests, and government that is looking to help workers and screenwriters do that sort of thing."



Axel Gonzalez

Arte es Etica

"If we look at where data centres are deployed globally, we can witness the deep geographical asymmetry. There are zones in the so-called Third World that are routinely selected for sacrifice, because the development of this technology requires resources that First World countries are unwilling or unable to expend. These infrastructures have consequences not only for our artistic labour, but also for the way we live and the way some of us are supposed to have a working life."

Roseli Figaro

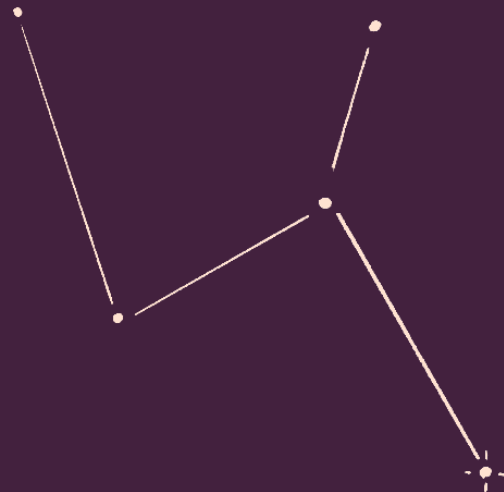
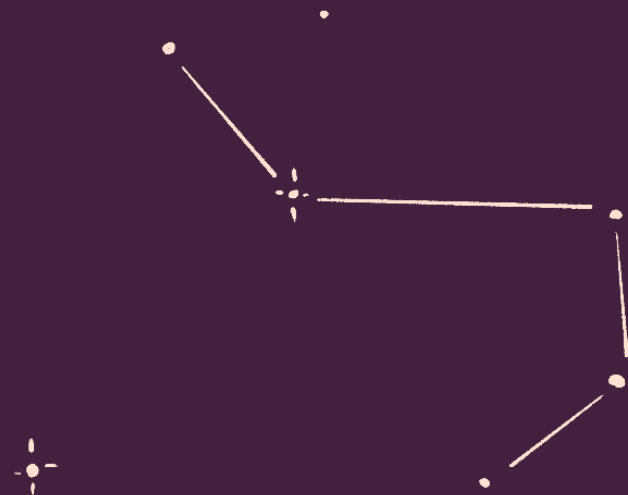
University of Sao Paulo

"Workers have the right to access and understand what happens to their labour data, so that they can better organize themselves and seek alternatives. What and how can we bargain with capital when the sensitive materialities of human work are the new frontier of dispossession and value creation? We resist, but we are far from having something truly strong enough to combat the ills of capitalism."

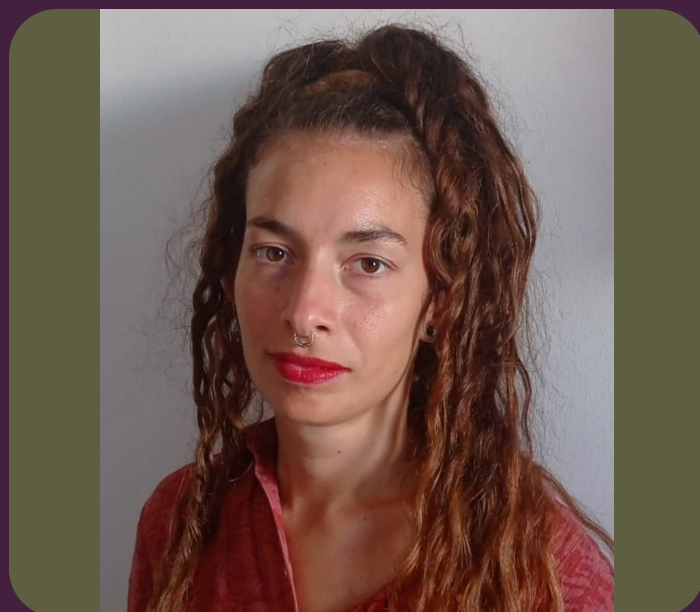
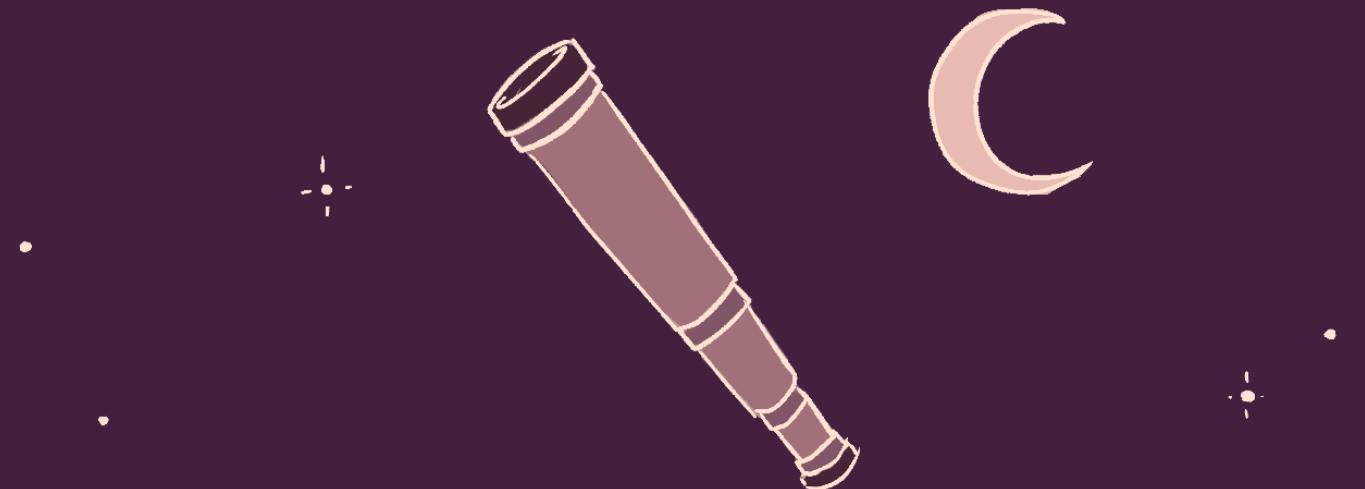




Simon Prefontaine
Communication Workers of America Canada & Bethesda Game Studios Montreal
"In the software tech industry, quality assurance is often seen as a low-skill domain, but really, there is no such thing as a low-skill job. Management really wanted to divide and conquer. They resisted our 'One Table' campaign because they know our power is in our unity across borders. It's a saying that management is the best organizer. Every time we were losing steam, Microsoft would do something to light the fires again, which we were very thankful for."



Declan Ingham
Canadian Union of Public Employees
"Workers have been struggling over technology since the very beginning, since the looms started interrupting work in Middle England. This is not a new terrain; this is a centuries-long struggle. Collective agreements have a bias to the immediate, not the future. This is always a difficult thing when addressing technology: How do you bargain a future threat when, you know, you have the day-to-day economics of trying to survive on the table right now?"



Nuria Soto
Mensakas
"Mensakas is part of an ecosystem that extends both nationally and internationally. We are a member of CoopCycle, a federation of more than 50 cooperatives worldwide that share the same open-source software. CoopCycle is more than a technological tool. It is a federation, and its software, released under a Coopyleft licence, belongs to the federation itself. We are also part of Som Ecològica, a second-degree cooperative composed of more than 11 cycle logistics cooperatives in Catalonia, approximately 80% of which are also members of CoopCycle. Mensakas was established primarily in response to the prevailing conditions of our sector. In Spain, conventional platforms charge businesses commissions of 20–25%, reflecting the monopolistic tendencies that began to emerge strongly around 2015."

Austin Robey
Subvert
"We want to create a platform not owned by a handful of investors, but by hundreds of thousands or millions of users. By doing so, we can demonstrate a replicable model that other people can use and iterate from to create collectively owned and controlled enterprises. And an economy where value flows to those who create it, not just those who invest in it."





David Ng
Seize the Means of Production

"I come to this work through this particular intersection of queer racialized identity organizing. And so when we wanted to form an organization or an entity to do this work, the unionized worker co-op model was one that was best aligned with our values. Unionized worker co-ops is one strategy within the broader labour movement. And the labour movement is one facet within intersectional liberation struggles. If technology is now a means of production, how do we seize control of it?"

Victoria Hernandez
Factorial

"We identified a dual gap: limited access to hardware and devices, and a shortage of accessible software for management and planning that cooperatives could use in a clear and comprehensive way. Our goal is to help cooperatives meet with tax and corporate obligations, strengthening their internal organization, and therefore their competitiveness. Public policy often has a normative bias because it analyzes problems based on models designed by and for traditional capital companies. Popular economies operate differently."



Gabriel Simeone
Homeless Workers' Movement in Brazil

"Public demonstration has also been an excellent school of organization and logistics. Our (MTST) occupations receive no support from the state. We have to manage everything ourselves, from distributing water to creating job opportunities. This is where the movement's technologies come in. We cannot also always ask the state to solve our problems. We work to build the power of the people, through autonomous and digital sovereignty initiatives. We will only truly solve our problems when we are able to control our future. That is our plan. Digital Solidarity Economies are a step towards this."

Jason Wiener
Stocksy United

"Stocksy is producing some of the most avant-garde stock art on the planet and using the cooperative model as a differentiator with retail consumers, small businesses, agencies, and large enterprises. They are building technology that enhances the premium value of their product to continue building stickiness with their customer base. And all that's in the economic service of the artists. All of it. So the technology is built by worker-owners to enhance the value and take-home income for the artists."





Luca Zuñiga Brenes

ALT Cooperativa

"In a cooperative, governing technology also means governing time tolerances and priorities. There is no single common sense. Everyone lives differently with their own needs, their own rhythms, their own crises. At ALT, we understand that every tool, even the smallest one, is also a political act. This is not just about surviving in the economy, it's about experimenting with another possible model of technology, one that is human and sustainable in every decision."

Krystal Kauffman

Distributed AI Research Institute (DAIR)

"I'm standing in front of you today as proof that if you give a worker the tools to do research, they will use that and go on to do more things and advocate. We are turning fighters into researchers and researchers into fighters, so we can continue empowering workers to fight for seats at the table and continue to influence policy. Discord, Telegram, and other social media forums are leveraged by workers to share information, expose exploitative tasks and requesters, and support one another. They're sites of bottom-up governance where the workers collectively create their own norms, their own warnings, and their own accountability systems."



Cecilia Muñoz Cancela

Argentine Federation of Tech Co-ops (FACTTIC)

"We should rethink cooperation as a kind of technology. Inter-cooperation helps us to imagine the kind of projects we really want to do. A few years ago, we collaborated with platform cooperative initiatives, joining forces with CoopCycle and we made the technical adaptations to Coop Cycle to function in Argentina and some countries over in Latin America. Projects like these could not happen within a single cooperative alone, no matter how big it is. Inter-cooperation is about sharing perspective, ideas and spreading the risk of doing that thing and building the enthusiasm of doing it."

Colin Clark

Lichen

"Technology is conditioning us to confuse scale with impact. It is built into the conceptualization of the platform as the unit of ownership and solidarity. Can we move from the notion of 'platform' to 'mesh', a more distributed, horizontal notion of scale? Can we build meshes of solidarity? Notions of sharing technology which involve sharing bits and pieces rather than saying, "Here, take my big platform and use it." Instead, what are the ways that we can do some little bits of API connection, sharing bits of code, federating where it works, not federating when it doesn't."





Clarissa Ribeiro Schinestsck
Labour Prosecution Office of Brazil

"Companies adopt PR tactics, such as greenwashing, for their discourse. They invest in marketing to present a proposal, but in reality, they concede nothing, grant no rights, and cause a negative ecological impact, leaving poverty and destruction in the societies where they operate. But the discourse is forceful. No work without real rights, and this story is also about you."

Juan Manuel Ottaviano
National University of San Martin

"Governing technology at work requires specific and precise forms of worker participation. To design these forms, we use concrete regulations that either prevent risky uses or mitigate risks. Some examples: productivity estimation metrics to achieve fairer profit distribution; human-in-the-loop review to limit automated sanctions; and the right to refuse tasks without sanction to empower workers in work organization. We must also increase workers' computational capacity to avoid concentrating power in corporations."



Ricard Espelt
Open University of Catalonia

"I believe that it is important we are trying to fight or to generate an alternative to platform capitalism. But beyond technological tools, we should also focus on the domain of knowledge. Open knowledge, including Creative Commons licensing, is vital, especially in research. The initiative does not come from the government thinking it should help the sector. Rather, the sector generates its own autonomy, builds its own networks, and only then does the government respond, replicate, or provide support."

Lucas Milanez
University of Sao Paulo

"To build a different future, it's necessary to believe in a different future. Digital Solidarity Economies are not exactly something new, but they aim to open new horizons through the history some of us are already building. They are about encouraging the development of public policies and collective popular initiatives that operate under principles of self-management and internal democracy, decent work, data ownership and software infrastructure, fighting against inequalities and fostering local economies."



RECAP

Lessons from Workers Governing Technologies

Ashique Ali Thuppilikkat

Across the world, workers are rising up and reclaiming power through organizing, even as Silicon Valley advances generative AI and platform economies that underpay, surveil, exhaust, and displace the very labour force that builds, trains, and maintains these systems. Yet workers' struggles and their efforts to govern technologies are neither straightforward nor free of contradictions. They involve ongoing experimentation with plural organizational and institutional forms, marked by continuous learning, unlearning, and relearning.

On September 25–26, 2025, the University of Toronto hosted the workshop “Workers Governing Technologies: Collective Strategies Across Contexts,” bringing together 20 workers and representatives of labour collectives from Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Spain, Mexico, and the United States. Across three roundtables, participants highlighted contemporary examples of workers governing technologies – from unions, grassroots collectives, and platform cooperatives, to digital solidarity economies rooted in alternative economic traditions from the Majority World, alongside cases from North America and Europe. The gathering underscored a vital insight: technologies do not govern work on their own. They are shaped by social relations, and those relations can be reorganized through collective struggle.

Collective Bargaining: Generative AI, Mobilizing, and Organizing

The opening session brought together worker organizers, researchers, and union advocates confronting generative AI through collective bargaining and grassroots action. Their contributions revealed that the struggle over generative AI is simultaneously a struggle over public narrative, legal frameworks, and the bodies and environments that bear its costs, and over building unions' capacity not merely to diagnose, but also to empower workers.

Panellists underscored how AI has become a terrain where struggles over pay, job security, creative autonomy, and the

very right to organize converge. The success of the 148-day Hollywood writers' strike of 2023, which won concrete protections against generative AI, highlights the importance of a public narrative strategy humanizes the real costs of generative AI and building solidarity within and beyond the picket line. Likewise, bargaining efforts by the Writers Guild of Canada and a unionization movement among North American game developers show the necessity of exerting pressure on governments to safeguard the very conditions that make bargaining possible. Finally, the Canadian Union of Public Employees reminded us that protections against AI encroachment already exist in provisions such as layoff procedures, retraining rights, and bumping rights.

Equally pressing was the question of whose bodies and whose land bear the material costs that make generative AI possible. Panellists from Latin America drew attention to the sacrificial geographies of generative AI: data centres consuming up to 20% of a Mexican town's water supply, underpaid data workers training AI systems across the Global South, mass layoffs in Argentina and Brazil publicly justified through the introduction of AI, and the systematic datafication of embodied human know-how by platform companies. The panel challenged the corporate discourse of AI as an inevitable force of history, diagnosing it as a narrative manufactured to demobilize workers, and argued that the most effective counter lies in offensive organizing that connects workplace struggles to broader publics and wider solidarities.

Co-operative Formation: Technology, Platforms, and Production

The second roundtable explored organizational innovation within the contemporary platform cooperative movement, examining its structural limits, available design safeguards, experiences beyond it, and the values that underpin its strengths.

The experience of platform cooperatives such as Stocksy United demonstrated that they can succeed by placing technology in service of artist income rather than investor returns. However, panellists stressed that ownership alone does not guarantee equity, and power asymmetries persist along lines of race, gender, class, and ability even within democratically governed cooperatives. Unionization within platform cooperatives was identified as providing a crucial layer of conflict resolution and political clarity, as demonstrated in the case of Seize the Means of Production, a unionized worker cooperative in Vancouver. At the same time, the roundtable raised concerns that the platform cooperative model may be approaching a structural limit in the era of generative AI, as foundational principles of data

cooperativism such as provenance, attribution, and the right to be forgotten become increasingly difficult to operationalize when data is transformed into weighted probabilities within AI systems, opening discussion of alternative forms such as distributed meshes of inter-cooperating nodes rather than ever-larger centralized platforms.

The discussions also highlighted the structural misfit between existing technologies and the needs of cooperative movements and the popular economy. Members of Factorial, an Argentinian cooperative supporting worker-recovered enterprises, pointed out that mainstream office software – designed for corporate firms – often remains economically and practically inaccessible to the popular economy, leaving social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook as de facto organizational tools. Furthermore, inter-cooperation emerged as a key principle of material resilience, not merely through the sharing of software infrastructures such as CoopCycle, but also in moments of crisis. When fire destroyed the premises of Mensakas, a cycle logistics cooperative in Barcelona in December 2024, the organization recovered 90% of its activity within three days through mutual aid from its solidarity network. The roundtable also drew on examples from the Majority World. Brazil's Homeless Workers' Movement has built Wi-Fi mesh networks, grassroots digital literacy programs, and a WhatsApp chatbot connecting workers to services and jobs in Sao Paulo, demonstrating how marginalized communities do not often wait for the state to act but instead build popular power themselves.

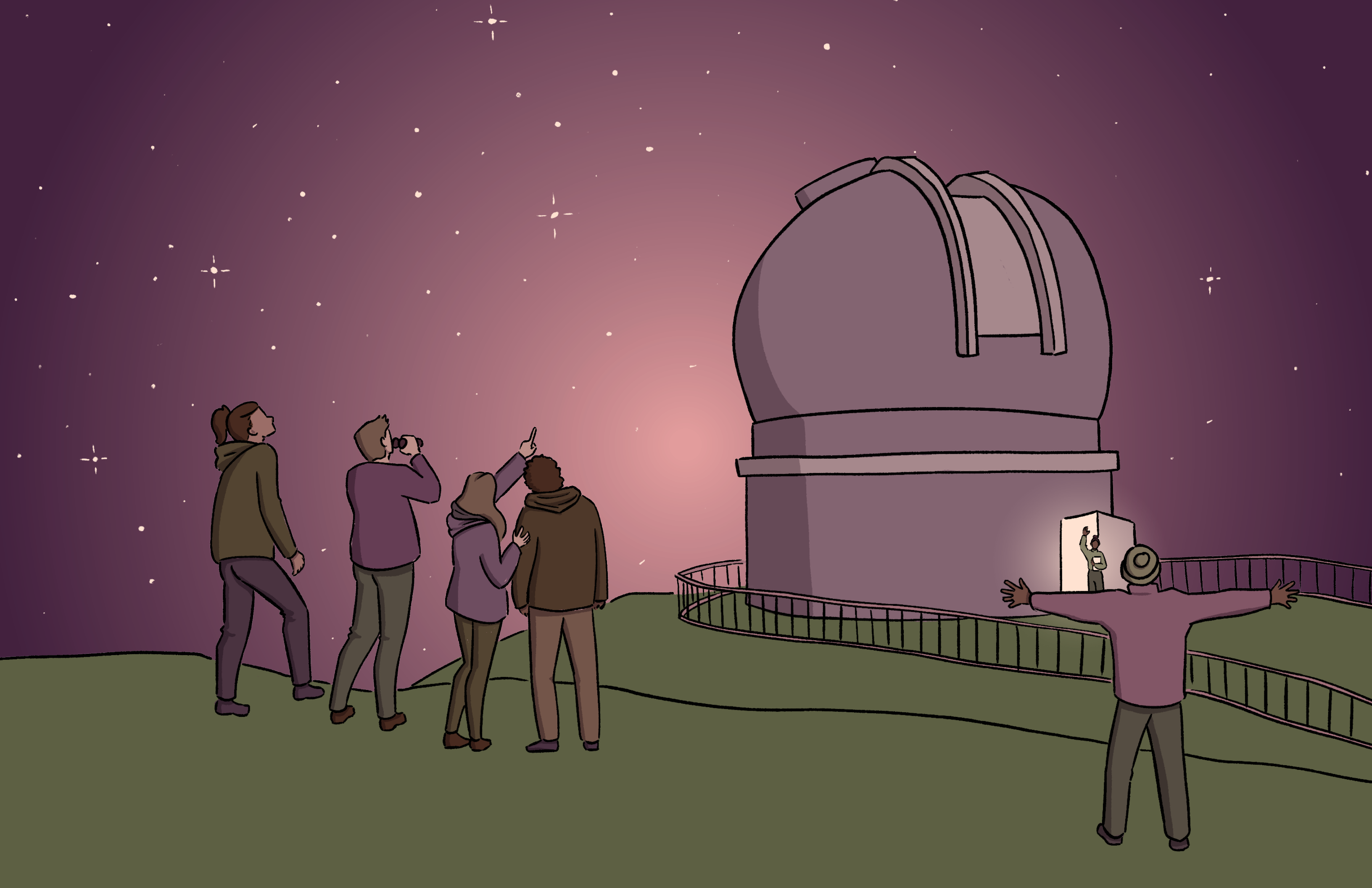
Policy Reform: Responsive Labour Regulation for the Digital Economy

The final roundtable turned to how research, law, and organizing can be combined to exert pressure on the regulatory terrain of the digital economy. The panel emphasized that the most enduring gains for workers arise not from policy advocacy from above alone, but from building institutions of worker-generated knowledge that enhance workers' capacities and challenge Big Tech's power, including at the level of discourse. The panel highlighted how worker forums and social media platforms such as Discord channels are sites of bottom-up governance where workers collectively produce norms, warnings, and accountability systems that corporate platforms refuse to provide. In the workers' inquiry methodology, as evidenced in the Data Workers' Inquiry, workers become community researchers. In Brazil, public campaigns such as “No work without real rights, and this story is also about you” have reached over 15 million people, revealing the everyday human cost of platform delivery and signifying solidarity work across various institutional partners. Collaboration between labour

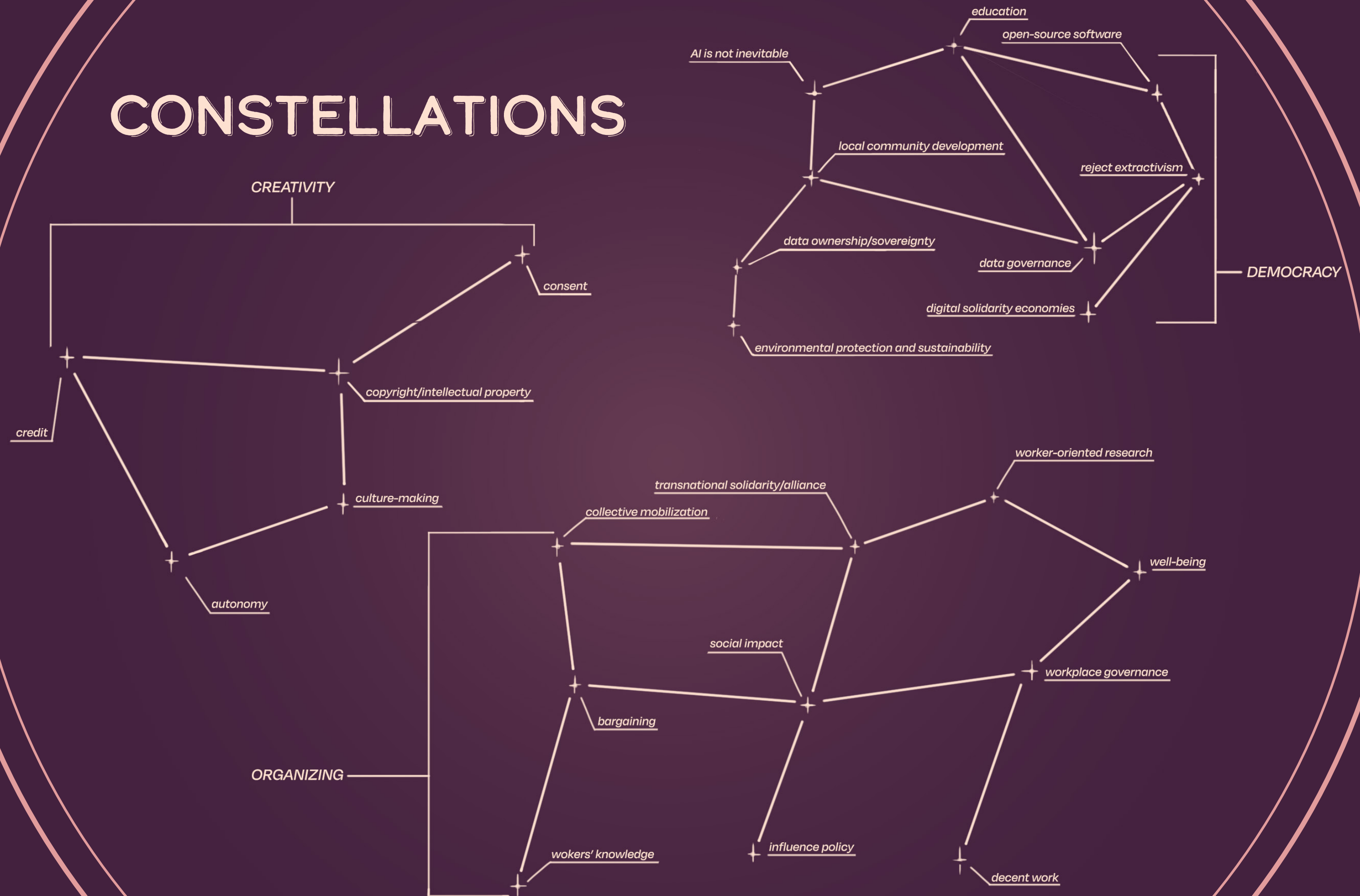
prosecutors and the national statistics agency has also produced the country's first official data on platform workers.

The panel also rethought inter-cooperation as extending beyond cooperatives to universities and public institutions. The Hire a Co-op campaign demonstrated how institutional support can catalyze worker-led alternatives. Furthermore, Barcelona's digital cooperative ecosystem, renowned for its social economy networks, worker federations, and feminist principles, further demonstrated that when workers build autonomous infrastructure, supportive government policy tends to follow, rather than the other way around.

The future of labour will not be written by Silicon Valley. It will be shaped, contested, negotiated, and claimed by a constellation of workers organizing in plural forms across the world.



CONSTELLATIONS



RESOURCES

We produced a series of videos during the Workers Governing Technologies event.

Check them out on DigiLabour's [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

Workshop participants shared a number of resources, including zines, websites, and articles. You can find them in [this folder](#).



FROM THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE



Ashique Ali Thuppilikkat

"The learnings from the workshop underscored the enduring truth of the slogan: workers united shall never be defeated. The terms on which technology enters working life do not go uncontested, contrary to the wishes and whims of Big Tech. The workshop highlighted that worker resistance is not a singular mode of action, but a spectrum of possible responses, ranging from strikes, marches, public campaigns, legal actions, and to the development of worker-owned technologies. Building worker power is, fundamentally, driven by concrete analysis of concrete conditions, by workers responding to capital's power with the power of organizing."



Julia Parke

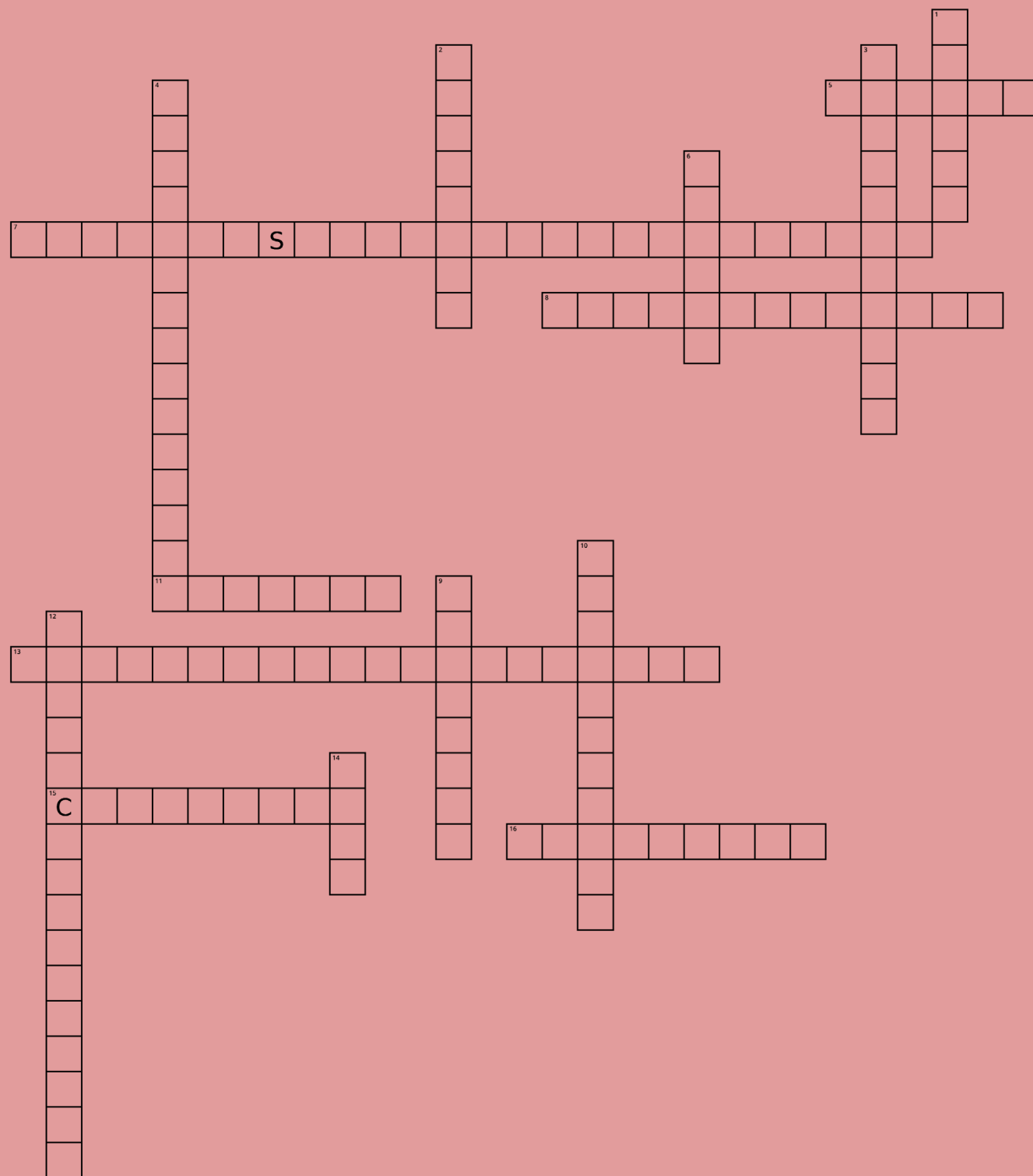
"What remains most memorable for me from Workers Governing Technologies are the authentic reactions and wisdoms our participants shared with us throughout our event, so generously shared and rooted in rich lived experiences. It was such an antidote to my own ivory tower. The empowering potential of cooperatives, the different ways in which digital sovereignty can be imagined and enacted, and the experiences of data workers were made vividly real through our meals and conversations, through active listening, and storytelling. This was an experience of very good, very exciting, and very consequential friction."



Madison Mackley

"Cooperative governance and collective technologies require us to rethink normative relationships to scale, profit, and utility. Workers Governing Technology gives proof of concept that a better world is possible; a world where cooperation, creativity, and respect are not merely ideals but embedded within labour and technology systems. The plurality of perspectives shared during the workshop, including lessons on organizing, regulatory interventions, community care and public data, provides concrete strategies for dismantling capitalist assumptions and enacting sustainable, collective futures."

CROSSWORD



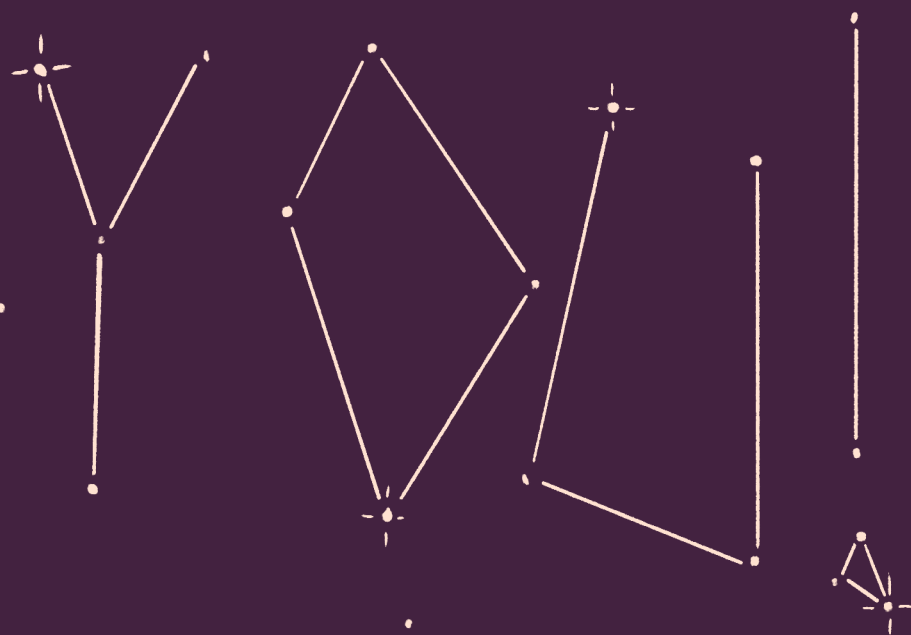
CLUES

Across

- 5) In what industry did workers at Bethesda Studios unionize in 2024, join the Communications Workers of America, and gain recognition from Microsoft?
- 7) The diverse practices, technologies, and organizational forms that challenge extractive models of the digital economy by embedding principles of cooperation, mutual aid, and shared ownership into data governance, platforms, and artificial intelligence is identified as?
Clue: Homeless Workers' Movement in Brazil (MTST)
- 8) Workers Inquiry emphasizes a ———, worker-led approach that centers workers' knowledge, fosters self-expression, and strengthens organizing capacity.
- 11) Cooperative building a Bandcamp-style marketplace owned and controlled by artists, labels, supporters, and workers.
- 13) What artists seek to protect when generative AI uses their work without permission.
- 15) A federation of bike couriers in Europe that has developed a platform that supports worker-owned bike delivery cooperatives.
- 16) Seize the Means of Production Video Coop is an example of a ——— worker cooperative that utilizes collective agreements for additional member protection.

Down

- 1) Post-2023 Hollywood strike agreement states generative AI cannot be recognised as a —.
- 2) Communication tool used by Tech Sector of the Homeless Workers' Movement in Brazil (MTST's) "Hire Who Fights" initiative in Brazil.
- 3) Infrastructures causing severe water shortages in Colón, Mexico.
- 4) A flexible copyright licence encouraging open access to creative content.
- 6) Stocksy prioritises human value over the pursuit of —.
- 9) A licence (often called Peer Production License) that allows only cooperatives or non-profits to use software, protecting collective work from capitalist appropriation.
- 10) A non-profit collective of creative professionals and independent visual artists addressing generative AI's impact on human creativity and the ecological costs of data centres, active across Europe and Latin America.
- 12) Solidarity principle demonstrated by the Argentine Federation of Technology, Innovation and Knowledge Worker Cooperatives (FACTTIC) when adapting platforms for local use.
- 14) This type of cooperativism emphasizes networks of loosely-affiliated, interoperable, local-scale systems.



Answers (in reverse):

1.} retirW {2.} ppastahW {3.} sretneC ataD {4.} snommoC evitaerC
 {5.} gnimaG {6.} tifoR {7.} seimonocE ytiradiloS latigiD
 {8.} yrotapicitraP {9.} tfeypoc {10.} acite se etra {11.} trevbuS {12.}
 noitarepooC retnI {13.} ytreporP lautcelletnI {14.} hseM
 {15.} elcyC pooC {16.} dezinoiU