Welcome to the Gig Economy: neoliberal industrial relations and the case of Uber

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Why did we select this research?

"Sharing Economy" companies have such widespread adoption of neoliberalism's industrial relations that a new moniker - "The Gig Economy" - has taken root. This paper uses Uber as a case study to discuss how Sharing Economy entities are merely the latest iteration of companies to enact the neoliberal playbook, including (a) (mis)classifying workers, (b) engaging in regime shopping, and (c) employing the most economically vulnerable, rather than giving rise to a new world of work altogether. The result is a crowding out of middle-class employment by precarious 'gigs' that lack legal protections and benefits.

Key Findings

- Over the last few decades, a pattern has developed where the winners are consumers and financial stakeholders, whereas the losers are the middle-class incumbent job holders in the industry being disrupted.

- Until new legislation is passed, Uber drivers maintain a more precarious economic situation than their conventional taxi driver peers.

- The case of Uber highlights how Gig Economy employers have exacerbated the disconcerting trends under neoliberal industrial relations. Uber engaged in misclassification of its workers, withdrawing from cities that did not acquiesce to their demands, and economically vulnerable workers, all with the intention to push down wages and to avoid paying benefits.

- Uber, though the largest Gig Economy employer, is by far from the only sharing economy company employing the neoliberal playbook. It preceded their existence and will last long after the company folds. But the trends they've accelerated, and the concerns which are raised because of it, are only going to become more pertinent as internet technology platforms continue to revolutionize the world of work.

Reference

Zwick, A. (2017) Welcome to the Gig Economy: neoliberal industrial relations and the case of Uber. *Geojournal*, Vol. 83: 679-691.