

Title: Labor Organizing and Economic Non-Domination

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Introduction

The economic implications of the recent republican revival have been analyzed by many. The response in the literature to the problem of economic domination has been varied. On one hand are market-friendly neo-republicans like Phillip Pettit who conceptualize domination in interpersonal terms, thus advocating for the individual ability to exit dominating relationships (Lovett, 2001: 101-2, 2009: 820; Dagger, 2006: 141; Pettit, 2006: 141, 2008; Lovett and Pettit, 2009: 24; Taylor, 2017: Ch 3, 2019: 214-5). On the other are market-skeptic radical republicans like Alex Gourevitch who, in conceptualizing domination in structural terms, push for the importance of workplace democracy (Gourevitch, 2013: 592, 598, 609, 2016; Anderson, 2015: 68-8, 2017: 69, 2019: 204-5; Muldoon, 2019: 16; O'Shea, 2019: 12-3; Gourevitch and Robin, 2020: 396).

The concern with economic domination is far from simply academic. It resurfaces frequently in contemporary discussions on large business corporations, which are accused of exercising excess and unaccountable power over their workers. Walmart has been the subject of a class-action lawsuit involving 200,000 past and current workers alleging forced off-the-clock work (Greenhouse, 2002). The COVID-19 pandemic, which has been a catalyst for growth for e-commerce, has also been a time for systematic layoffs and increased workload (Sainato, 2020). At the same time, Amazon has been under criticism since its founding for its union busting practices. Thanks to advancements in online technology, it has cranked up its aggressive surveillance over employee organizing (Palmer, 2020). While the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) protects the right to organize, it does not prohibit employer

surveillance, thus testifying to the law's inability to protect workers' freedoms. For critics, such circumstances constitute domination.

I argue that for economic non-domination, exclusionary institutions like labor unions, non-union labor organizations, and social movements that promote the sectional interests of the politically disenfranchised are necessary.¹ The problem with the neo-republican account is that the regulations and protections that it advocates can only be secured through labor organizing as a component of national politics. Legislative and judicial institutions are vulnerable to special interest capture, in which case political organizing is needed to put pressure on policymakers. The meaningful opportunity to exit dominating relationships is necessary for non-domination, but labor organizing is the main mechanism through which they can be achieved. I contribute to the radical republican side of the debate by suggesting the need to pay more attention to the intersectional demands of labor organizing for equal non-domination. I do this by drawing from feminist political theory and practice.

I should note that it is not my aim in this paper to settle a conclusive conception of non-domination. I operationalize what has been called the external view of domination, which problematizes the material and institutional sources of unjustified power.² In the next section, I describe the ways in which the competing camps of republicanism depart from each other within the external view of domination.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In Section I, I sketch the fault lines in the economic republicanism literature. Section II explains why neo-republicanism fails to

¹ By exclusionary institutions, I mean broadly those organizations that operate in the public domain and have a political character, but do not advance the common good or public welfare. Rather, they promote the sectional interests of their members or a particular group.

² In his recent book, Steven Klein (2020) advances a multi-dimensional view of domination. He suggests that competing theories of domination all explain different faces of domination, comprising the external, the interpersonal, and the abstract. External or direct domination sees domination as a problem of uncontrolled power. Interpersonal or structural domination is the exclusion of certain groups from the "space of reasons", thus is associated with justification. Abstract or subjective domination is the constitution of subjects by social imperatives that functionally serve to maintain systems of power. While Klein associates the external view with the neo-republican camp, radical republicans also subscribe to an external view of domination. Therefore, in this paper, I work with this broadly republican conception of domination.

secure economic non-domination. Section III argues for labor organizing as the main mechanism for non-domination. In Section IV, I argue that radical republicans need to take seriously the intersectional demands of labor organizing.

I. Economic Republicanisms

Republicanism is an intellectual tradition that advocates for freedom and independence. The central idea that separates republicanism from other theories of freedom is a concern with uncontrolled social and political power. In broad brush strokes, republicanism suggests that freedom is violated by interference of an arbitrary kind. What exactly the term arbitrary means to republicans is contested. If interference is arbitrary in a substantive sense, it will fail to track or reflect the interests of those whom it interferes with. If interference is arbitrary in a procedural sense, then those whose freedoms are restricted will not have had control over the deployment of the interference. For the purposes of this paper, it is not necessary for me to take a stance on this distinction. In this paper, I focus on the republican debate as it pertains to the economic realm. I identify three fault lines within the literature on economic republicanism: the nature of domination, the role of markets, and institutional arrangements that best promote non-domination.

The nature of domination

One of the main disagreements within republicanism is on the nature of domination. For neo-republicans, domination is a problem of bilateral relations, which means that it takes place between an oppressor and an oppressed. Economic domination is exemplified by the subjection of the worker to the arbitrary will of their employer. Pettit (1997: 141) evokes to the image of the nineteenth century wage slave, who works amidst a chronic state of anticipation, awaiting interference that can be deployed at the employer's whim. The absence of legal regulations makes exploitation and degradation worse, while the lack of social

protections gives workers no reasonable alternatives. In this bilateral relationship, domination is in plain sight; it has an easily identifiable perpetrator and victim. Yet, the role of structural factors is not eliminated altogether. When Frank Lovett (2010, Ch.2) argues that domination is always structural, I take him to mean that relationships of domination are maintained by something akin to the Rawlsian basic structure. Society's institutions and norms provide legal and material support, and social meaning, to relationships of domination.

Radical republicans do not reject this picture but argue that it does not capture the crucial part of the story. For them, domination is not only structurally enabled but *essentially* structural (Gourevitch, 2013; Muldoon, 2019; O'Shea, 2019; Thompson, 2018). Face to face interaction between oppressor and oppressed is not necessary for the former to dominate the latter. The crux of economic domination is not the probability of arbitrary interference, but the structural dispersion of power. The private ownership of the means of production makes workers structurally dependent on employers. To be sure, dependence is a central concern for neo-republicans as it is for radical republicans. But *structural* dependence suggests that dependence is *inescapable* for those who are excluded from ownership of the means of production; the worker may escape this or that employer but cannot escape the employment relationship (Gourevitch 2013).

The role of markets

The neo-republican stance towards markets ranges from lukewarm to celebratory. With suitably regulated markets and the advent of the social welfare state, the capitalist employment relationship is made consistent with the neo-republican conception of freedom (Pettit, 2006; Taylor, 2017, 2019). The neo-republican approach towards markets is best understood as proceduralist. Unenforceable contracts and contracts of destitution, both of which are captured by the nineteenth century worker, are dominating as they undermine the notion of voluntariness that underlies the contract. They are things that reasonable people

would not agree to. Thus, wage slavery should be abolished through a minimum wage, or a basic income introduced to eliminate the need to trade away one's freedom from domination (Lovett 2010, Pettit 2008). But neo-republicans object that substantial inequalities that accumulate from market exchanges in themselves undermine freedom. So long as contract has been entered into voluntarily, that is in the absence of a threat of penalty, then market transactions are compatible with freedom as non-domination (Pettit, 2006).

The critique of the neo-republican position on markets is two-fold. Radical republicans argue that the contract does not reflect the common will of the employer and the employee. The two do not come together on equal footing like the meeting of two minds (Anderson 2015: 50). The vast inequalities in bargaining power mean that the typical worker does not negotiate but accepts the terms set by his or her employer. The upshot is that the employment contract only tracks the will of the employer. As such, the contract should not be taken as the expression of freedom. Critics of neo-republicanism have also argued that we should view markets in their actual states and not as idealized constructs (Klein, 2017; Sagar, 2019). Markets are not the background condition against which political government and the rule of law are erected. Rather, it is the other way around: markets in actual societies are products of political processes and subject to contestation; their semblance of naturalness is a political fiction (Klein 2017). As distributive apparatuses that allocate opportunities, wealth, and services, markets constrain people's freedoms in important ways, thus making them prime candidates for republican control.

Institutional proposals

When it comes to the kinds of institutions that best secure non-domination, the neo-republican tendency is to favor state institutions like social welfare and the rule of law. The majority of neo-republicans favor policies like a basic income and other kinds of welfare state provisions (Lovett, 2001: 101-2, 2009: 820; Dagger, 2006: 141; Pettit, 2006: 141, 2008;

Lovett and Pettit, 2009: 24; Taylor, 2017: Ch 3, 2019: 214-5). In casting a security net, the social welfare state decreases the individual cost of exiting a social relationship (Lovett 2009: 39). Social relationships like employment and marriage, while voluntary, are often marked by asymmetric dependencies that makes exit costs for one party much higher than for the other. For instance, both employer and employee depend on the capitalist employment relationship to further their own ends (one needs labor, and the other, wages), but exit costs for workers are typically much higher. A (universal) basic income, means-tested assistance, and unemployment benefits are some of the ways in which neo-republicans would seek to minimize individual dependence on social relationships. These make exit more than just a formal right but a real option.

When it comes to voluntary relationships, the rule of law also plays a role in protecting individuals against domination. The rule of law secures non-domination through policies and legislation that facilitate exit. Non-domination can be achieved through laws that make it easier for women to file for divorce, or through the prohibition of non-compete clauses, which bar former employees from starting or working in rival companies. The rule of law achieves non-domination also through the regulation of social relationships. For instance, subjecting corporations to tort law would limit the unaccountable power corporations have over their employees (Pettit, 2012: 116-7). At-will employment, which gives the right to employers to fire employees for any reason and without warning, should also be prohibited (Pettit 1997: 142).

The radical republican path towards non-domination is through transforming the capitalist employment relationship by giving workers more voice in their workplaces. The idea is institutionalized through workplace democracy (Gourevitch, 2013: 592, 598, 609, 2016; Anderson, 2015: 68-8, 2017: 69, 2019: 204-5; Muldoon, 2019: 16; O'Shea, 2019: 12-3; Gourevitch and Robin, 2020: 396). Workplace democracy requires that workers exercise a

degree of control over the firm's productive assets. But it does not necessarily imply worker *ownership* of these assets.³ Radical republicans like Elizabeth Anderson advocate for democratic control over firm government, in the form of class-based representative structures (Anderson 2019: 206). On the other hand, radical republicans like James Muldoon (2019) and Tom O'Shea (2019) are in favor of a kind of workplace democracy in which the means of production are publicly owned. In both iterations of workplace democracy, workers get a say in firm governance. Their degree of control can range from micro level decisions like work hours to macro level decisions like growth strategies. In each case, workplace democracy features as the institutional linchpin of radical republicanism. By giving workers control over the firm government, workplace democracy institutionalizes non-domination.

II. Neo-republicanism and the failure to achieve economic non-domination

Before developing an independent case for labor organizing, I will try to show that neo-republicanism fails to achieve economic non-domination. This section argues that without strong labor movements, social protections and the rule of law are weak tools for securing non-domination. Neo-republicans cannot rely exclusively on exit as the mechanism of non-domination because labor organizing is necessary to achieve the welfare protections and social services that make exit possible. Phillip Pettit does not rely exclusively on exit but suffers from a similar problem. He fails to notice how important labor organizations are to the maintenance of the rule of law. Without strong labor movements, the rule of law is vulnerable to special interest capture by powerful groups. This vulnerability undermines the promise of the rule of law to secure non-domination.

Exit and organized labor

³ On the debate around the validity of the distinction between ownership and control of productive assets, see Ciepley (2013) and Landemore & Ferreras (2016).

Robert Taylor (2013, 2017, 2019) is a staunch advocate of the necessity of exit for non-domination. Voice and exit are complementary, but non-domination can only be achieved through exit, which is refigured as a form of voice (Taylor 2017). In lowering exit costs and providing out-of-work alternatives like a basic income, voice is thereby indirectly amplified. The attraction of this alternative is that it avoids domination by (quasi)public agents like work councils, unions, and civil servants charged with the planning and implementation of voice-friendly policies. Voice could be a desirable means to non-domination, had it not been so vulnerable to abuse. Being in the sole discretion of the individual, the threat of exit is a form of voice that cannot be subverted by external agents.

For Taylor, making exit credible requires that exit costs be lowered, and a protectionist welfare state reintegrate workers back into the labor market.⁴ This is not the libertarian stance that the formal right of exit is sufficient for freedom. Within this framework, the state is a crucial actor in protecting individuals in their private relations by facilitating their exit. It does this in various ways, from providing financial assistance to offering social services to ease their transition to independence. Unemployment benefits and job retraining programs are some of the ways in which the state makes exit less costly. Where Taylor goes wrong is in assuming that a strong welfare state is possible in the absence of organized labor power. Not only does exit require state power, but labor organizing is also necessary to direct the state towards progressive ends.

Historical evidence suggests that labor organizing as a component of national politics achieves the kinds of policies that Taylor advocates. To show this, let's turn to Northern Europe, specifically the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark. These countries are significant for both Taylor and I, but for different reasons. Taylor evokes them to substantiate his vision of a generous social welfare state that embraces open markets.

⁴ The model that Taylor describes is “flexicurity”, which characterizes liberalized Nordic economies in their shift from policies that protect individuals from the effects of the market to those that facilitate their integration into it, while social protections remain strong as before (Thelen, 2014).

These countries “not only promote competition in labor markets but also resource exit through various government services and income transfers” (Taylor, 2017: 63). They thus combine features of liberal and social democratic government. While correct, this picture is missing an important component that undermines the very core of Taylor’s argument. The social welfare state that is so crucial for exit, thus non-domination, has been made possible by the efforts of the long-standing organized labor movement. Working class mobilization in the interwar years was decisive in early welfare state consolidation in advanced capitalist countries (Hicks, 2000). Likewise, the Golden Age of welfare state development, which took place in the post-war period until the mid-1980s, was shaped by the interplay between national labor movements, party politics, and constitutional structures (Huber & Stephens, 2001). The strength of national labor movements was one of the decisive factors in the development of modern welfare states. The stronger the organized labor movement, the more generous the social welfare state. Comparative historical analysis suggests that labor organizing is crucial for the activation of labor-friendly social protections and services. The welfare state facilitates exit and makes it less costly for individuals. But historical evidence undermines Taylor’s argument that non-domination is possible in the absence of organized labor power.

What’s more, Taylor cannot accommodate labor organizing within his account of non-domination. Taylor divorces exit from voice because voice is vulnerable to abuse by unelected officials. Exit, on the other hand, is a mechanism that is solely in the discretion of the individual. The irony of the exit-only proposal is that it *requires* unelected officials like state bureaucrats to devise and implement exit policies. The social policies and services that complement the free-exit world call forth the state’s immense regulatory and enforcement powers. For exit to be a viable defense against economic domination, state institutions need to be mobilized to devise, implement, and enforce “high levels of social support in the form

of generous welfare benefits and job retraining” (Taylor, 2017: 49). The social welfare state is nothing but a complex web of institutions populated with (un)elected officials with wide-reaching regulatory, distributive and enforcement powers. This undercuts the very premise of Taylor’s proposal that exit is individual power par excellence. Taylor rejects organized politics for the same reason that he rejects the state machinery: both invite the prospect of domination. By turning to the very countries that Taylor models his proposal on, I have shown that Taylor cannot wish away organized politics. Organized labor is the primary mechanism for achieving the social protections and services necessary for economic non-domination.

The claim that voice-friendly policies invite domination by (quasi)public agents is overstated and misguided. Comparative political economy shows us that the social welfare states of Northern Europe did not arise from nascent egalitarian tendencies, but through the efforts of organized politics. The process of welfare state formation involved strong labor movements, chief among them, labor unions. We do not need to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Against the danger of public domination, our response should be to uphold a vision of democracy that responds to the demands of marginalized groups (Klein, 2020). Organized politics plays a primary role in achieving economic non-domination. Dismissing it suggests that policy is a one-way street, thus foreclosing opportunities for deliberative and participatory institutions to direct and orchestrate efforts against economic domination.

Fragility of the rule of law

Another prominent neo-republican response to economic domination is to emphasize the rule of law. This is the approach taken by Phillip Pettit, who prioritizes democratic institutions and the rule of law to achieve economic freedoms. The rule of law is an important aspect of non-domination, but when it comes to economic freedoms, it is ultimately insufficient. I

argue that legislative and judicial institutions are vulnerable to special interest capture, in which case political organizing is needed to put pressure on policymakers. Reforming corporate and employment laws, as Pettit suggests, is certainly important, but they cannot be achieved without strong labor movements.⁵ I demonstrate my argument through the example of the United States, where, historically, employers have had disproportionate amounts of political influence, and the state has often sided with employers to quash the labor movement. Large business corporations, lobbying organizations, and financial institutions exert significant influence over legislation and policymaking. The power that corporate interests enjoy over politics undermines the ideal of non-domination (Rahman, 2016).

One might argue that my critique is not fair. Judicial and legislative institutions have never been guided by republican ideals. Had they been, they would have shunned from the political sphere corporate interests that undermine democratic equality. Had they been, we would see more laws and policies that protect workers from the unfair labor practices of employers. Workers would be able to unionize without facing discrimination; the union busting practices of corporations would face consistent and significant fines and legal action; employers would not be able to fire workers at-will. The truly republican state, one might say, would not let workers become vulnerable and dependent on employers in the first place. But it is unclear that Pettit's republican state would provide robust protections for workers. This is because of the centrality of the concept of the common interest as the guiding principle of politics (Pettit, 2000, 2019). "A certain good will represent a common interest of

⁵ The exception to Pettit's omission of labor organizing is the discussion in his earliest book-length treatment of republicanism (Pettit 1997: 142-3). Pettit brings up the subject to suggest that neo-republicanism is congenial to socialism. Unlike liberalism, republicanism is critical of the ideal of free labor, and supports collective industrial action to hold employers accountable and win back workers' freedom from domination. While welcome, this treatment of collective action falls short. First, there is a logical gap in Pettit's argument. A strike is a costly and risky tool; it takes months to organize a successful strike. This means that a successful strike *presupposes* strong and robust labor unions, which Pettit does not consider. Moreover, Pettit seems to believe that the grounds for collective industrial action belong to a distant past. The conditions of the nineteenth century, such as wage slavery, that legitimated disruptive collective action have been eradicated, so there is not much need for labor organizing anymore. Even if it is true that wage slavery has been eradicated under post-industrial capitalism, I would still argue that Pettit presents a rather narrow view of labor organizing, one whose sole function is to oppose the gravest kinds of employer misconduct.

a population, I say, just so far as cooperatively avowable considerations support its collective provision” (Pettit 2000:108). Common interest reasons or solutions generate widespread acceptance in the deliberative process. As solutions to disagreements, they are preferred by each participant over other alternatives. This ensures that the outcomes of the political process reflect the will of no one and are non-dominating.

The problem is that the rhetoric of common interest is regularly used as an ideological cover for anti-labor legislation and policies. The frustrated New Deal era labor reforms show that the rule of law is a weak tool against domination.⁶ The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA aka the Wagner Act), ratified in 1935, “was a radical legislative initiative” that codified workers’ right to unionize and strike, whilst prohibiting employers from undertaking a list of unfair labor practices (Lichtenstein, 2003: 36). The Wagner Act recognizes that collective industrial action has “the intent or the necessary effect of burdening or obstructing commerce” (NLRA 29 U.S.C. §§ 151). The phrase ‘necessary effect’ suggests that systematic employer wrongdoing and abuse can only be remedied through labor organizing. The Act acknowledges the social reality against which it was written, and that social reality is one in which workers are structurally disempowered by corporate prerogatives and economic uncertainties. Twelve years later, an amendment (Labor Management Relations Act, aka Taft-Hartley Act) in 1947 significantly curtailed the effectiveness and freedoms of unions. It set out to “proscribe practices...which affect commerce and are inimical to the general welfare, and to protect the rights of the public in connection with labor disputes affecting commerce” (LMRA 29 U.S.C. §§ 141b). The phrases ‘general welfare’ and ‘rights of the public’ are key, as they suggest that the law was motivated by something akin to the common interest. Taft-Hartley equates economic productivity and efficiency with public welfare, which is then set in opposition to fundamental worker freedoms. Yet, the political

⁶ I thank Will Raby for discussion on this topic.

consequences of Taft-Hartley have been devastating for individual workers and the American labor movement. The Act set off an onslaught of attacks on union activity, including on boycotts and sympathy strikes, that deeply depoliticized unions. It has mired unions in lawsuits and unexpected bureaucratic requirements. As a result, unions were deterred from collective industrial action or forced to withdraw their demands. The reasons for declining union membership in the United States are complex. But from a legislative standpoint, the enduring effects of Taft-Hartley and other anti-labor legislation can be seen in recent statistics, which show that employers were charged with violating federal law, including union-related firings, coercion, and disciplining, in 41.5% of all official union elections in 2016 and 2017 (McNicholas et al., 2019). This pivotal era of American labor reforms demonstrates the vulnerability of the rule of law to ideological capture.⁷

In pointing out to recent history to argue that the rule of law is insufficient for non-domination, I moved to the realm of non-ideal theory. The point is to take seriously the broader social and political context in which legislative and judicial institutions operate. This context is capitalistic, where special interests and the economic calculus trump worker freedoms. We should not bracket these circumstances in our theorizing because we rarely get to design institutions from scratch. What is the alternative, then? I believe the alternative is a conception of democracy that recognizes the partial interests of the marginalized. Without this recognition, republican democracy is unlikely to protect the politically disenfranchised from domination. Democracy modeled on the common interest overlooks conflict in politics. Democracy fails to achieve non-domination if it requires political actors to quiet those very characteristics that make them vulnerable to domination.

III. Labor organizing for economic non-domination

⁷ The ideological motives behind the Taft-Hartley Act can be seen clearly in the subsequent framing and purging of communists from union ranks (Lichtenstein 2003: 115).

Radical republicans hold that we need workplace democracy for economic non-domination, arguing that, like the government, the economy also needs to be organized democratically. But they have not theorized adequately a crucial step, which is the importance of labor organizing. I argue that the primary means to economic non-domination is through exclusionary institutions that promote the sectional interests of the politically disenfranchised. Places like labor unions, non-union labor organizations, and the social movements of the disenfranchised are necessary to promote workplace democracy and other radical republican proposals. I identify four functions of labor organizing that help realize the radical republican agenda. These are *epistemic*, *deliberative*, *pedagogical*, and *ontological*. I will take up each of these in turn.

Labor organizing is implicit in the radical republican account. This is apparent in the fact that, unlike exit and the rule of law, workplace democracy is a labor-led institution or set of institutions. For workplace democracy to get off the ground and to succeed, labor needs to have built the tools to make it work. The functions of labor organizing that I theorize below are crucial in this respect, in achieving and maintaining radical republican institutions.

It should be clear that I am not suggesting labor organizing as second best to workplace democracy or other more radical proposals, like the socialist republicanism that Tom O'Shea (2019) and James Muldoon (2019) have elaborated. First, I do not believe that labor organizing will become redundant in a democratically organized economy. Labor organizations are vital to a democratically run economy. Labor unions, non-union labor organizations, and the social movements of the disenfranchised would retain their adversarial role in checking workplace democratic institutions. They would also have an advisory role in making policy recommendations to lawmakers and firm governments. Though, their importance is likely to wane as a multiplicity of organizations and institutions share the burden of representing the needs and interests of the economically marginalized. Second,

labor organizing plays an independent role in radical republican theory by answering the perennial question of how to achieve social change. Much ink has been spilled on challenges to neo-republicanism and the outlines of radical republicanism, but little has been said on how radical republican goals can be achieved.⁸ Labor organizing plays a vital part in economic non-domination that the literature has overlooked. Now, let us look at the specific functions of labor organizing in achieving economic non-domination.

First, labor organizations serve an *epistemic* function by helping workers discover the nature of their domination. They help workers make sense of their experiences of domination in the workplace and in the labor market. An example of the epistemic function of labor organizing is United for Respect's Fair Workweek Initiative. United for Respect is a multiracial grass-roots labor organization of retail workers. It has sprung from the organizing efforts of Walmart workers across the country. One of its current campaigns is the Fair Workweek Initiative. The campaign demands the opportunity to work full-time and predictable hours, saying "[w]ithout enough say into our work hours, we juggle the demand for constant availability and work schedules that change unpredictably... We all need a workweek we can count on – one that allows all of us to care for our families, stay healthy, and get ahead" (United for Respect, 2020). The initiative thus asserts the importance of time for a fulfilling human life. Time is an intangible but measurable resource, and a source of power that employers have over employees. The emphasis on time, as opposed to wages or protections sheds new light on the nature of domination in the online retail sector.

Moreover, the kind of knowledge at stake in labor organizing is active and dialogic, as opposed to passive and monologic. It is gained through experience, and through a dialogic process with others whom one shares experiences with. The collective and participatory act

⁸ Alex Gourevitch's (2013) account of 19th century labor republicanism is an exception to this omission. While Gourevitch offers a valuable contribution to the literature, his is a historical project, whereas my objective in this paper is to offer general theory of the role of labor organizing for radical republicanism.

of producing knowledge is significant, as it makes the knowledge that is gained lasting and transformative.

Second, labor organizations serve a *deliberative* function by developing alternative forms of reasoning and claim-making that challenge exclusionary standards of deliberation. Deliberative standards like rationality and objectivity exclude partial and emotive appeals as legitimate sources of normativity. But these are the very ways in which marginalized groups tend to make their claims and demands. Their exclusion denies marginalized groups equal standing in deliberation. Coming back to our previous example, the Fair Workweek Initiative pushes back on the rationality that underlies the scheduling practices at Amazon. It claims that these practices prioritize efficiency to the detriment of workers' humanity. The testimonial from Liz Marin, a United for Respect member, puts it well: "We are people. We have families that we deserve to spend time with. We deserve to be more than just workers" (United for Respect, 2020). The statement evokes the language of respect and dignity as values that every human being deserves. In this sense, it makes a universal appeal. But it also points out to the fact that employers like Amazon deprive workers of these very values. So, in this way, it makes a subjective and emotive claim. In its deliberative function, labor organizing challenges standards of deliberation like rationality and universality that exclude the marginalized from equal recognition in deliberation.

Third, labor organizations serve a *pedagogical* function by allowing their members to develop the critical tools necessary to challenge systems of power. Learning takes place at all levels of collective organizing, including tasks such as producing pamphlets, giving a speech at a rally, and recruiting potential members. These tasks involve the deployment of important skills like articulation, communication, and persuasion. Learning also happens in the more straightforwardly political acts of deliberation and voting. These actions instill political virtues like dialogue, listening, and sharing which are crucial in the life of a political agent.

Moreover, learning takes place in more traditional settings like trainings, workshops, and seminars. Cain Shelley (2021) has recently argued that activist-led education plays a crucial role in realizing egalitarian social change. Activist-led education targets the cognitive biases and epistemic vices that get in the way of political participation to achieve social change. In its pedagogical function, labor organizing does something similar. It equips its participants with the critical tools to think reflectively, to challenge the dominant frames through which they judge their circumstances (Shelley 2021). An additional advantage of labor organizing is that we are much more likely to find case-studies and models in the world that we can emulate.

Finally, labor organizations serve an *ontological* purpose in helping to bring about the emergence of a collective subject. Collective organizing orients its participants towards shared goals, judgments, and desires. Crucially, the collective subject is not defined by what the individual participants *are* but what they *do*. The goals, judgments, and desires of the participants are not stable features of their identity. Rather, they materialize around a shared *object*, like a meeting, rally, or a petition. Thus, the collective subject that organizing brings about is temporary and circumstantial. It is short-lived and limited to a certain space, emerging in the act of protest or making a public demand. Kathi Weeks (2011: Ch.3) describes the formation of collective subjectivity in her account of the Wages for Housework movement. The movement started in the 1970s to fight for the recognition and remuneration of unwaged domestic labor. What sets this movement apart from many others, Weeks suggests, is that the demand for recognition was affectively charged and a call to action, not a calculated and measured response to injustice. As such, the movement refused the language of needs and rights, with their tone of recipience and moderation. In making a *demand*, it shifted emphasis from object to subject, passive to active, reason to affect. Here, the demand stands for the temporary convergence of the diverse array of goals, judgments, and desires

that resides within the movement. In this temporary convergence, it facilitates the emergence of a collective subject.

How do the *epistemic, deliberative, pedagogical, and ontological* aspects of labor organizing contribute to the radical republican agenda?

1. Labor organizing produces bodies of knowledge that assert worker freedoms and challenge the capitalist and neoliberal status quo. It pushes the limits of the possible and the feasible, affirming the viability of alternative arrangements like workplace democracy.
2. Labor organizing develops alternative modes of claim-making and reasoning that assert the marginalized as equal participants in the political process. By challenging exclusionary standards of deliberation, it lends credibility and normative force to the arguments and proposals of the marginalized.
3. Labor organizing equips its participants with the critical tools to articulate and communicate their critical vision and demand for freedom. The roles and responsibilities that members undertake help them develop the skills and virtues to become more effective and informed political agents in efforts for social change.
4. In the process, labor organizing brings about the emergence of a collective subject. The formation of the collective subject is less functional and more constitutive of collective organizing; it is the natural consequence of organizing efforts. It constitutes “a process of becoming the kind of people who – or, rather, the kind of collectivities that” need, want, and feel entitled to freedom (Weeks 2011:131). In this way, it points to the productive and transformative potential of collective organizing.

Radical republicans should embrace labor organizations like unions, non-union labor organizations (e.g., United for Respect), and the social movements of the marginalized. Doing so achieves a couple things. First, it takes seriously the role that the marginalized themselves play in fighting for economic non-domination. It casts them not as passive

recipients of social protections and services but as active political agents in the fight for democratic equality (Klein, 2020). Second, it pushes the radical republican agenda further by theorizing how lasting social change can happen. It answers, at least in part, the perennial question of normative political theory, the question of how we can get from here to there. Throughout this paper, I have used examples (United for Respect, and Wages for Housework) of intersectional forms of labor organizing headed by racial and gendered minorities. Yet, the history of most labor organizing has not been intersectional, in practice if not also in principle. In fact, labor organizing has been notoriously dominated by male, industrial, and unionized workers. This is not only anachronistic (labor is more diverse than ever), but also does not square with the ideal of democratic equality that radical republicans aspire to. In the next section, I will elaborate the importance of an intersectional mode of labor organizing for radical republican theory.

IV. Towards more diverse labor organizations

Despite the possibilities of labor organizing, the danger remains that collective action and exclusionary institutions silence the voices of their most marginalized members. Identity formation and group action can mask in-group heterogeneity for the sake of efficiency and coherence. This is a danger that radical republicans should heed. So far, they have understated the intersectional dimension of economic domination. Indeed, ethnographic studies suggest that the lived experience of domination varies greatly along dimensions like race, gender, and occupational stratum (Reich & Bearman, 2018). Moreover, a feminist analysis suggests that economic domination is not limited to the productive sphere but also includes the gendered division of labor (Cicerchia, 2019). In this section, I will elaborate an intersectional view of economic domination. I will conclude by suggesting what this means for labor organizations.

Exclusionary institutions like labor unions and non-union labor organizations, as well as horizontally organized social movements promote the sectional interests of the politically disenfranchised. Yet, in rallying their members around a shared identity and group-based demands, they have the potential to perpetuate inequalities. Labor unions around the world have suffered from a privileged worker bias. They have prioritized the interests of the ideal worker, who has historically been the male bread winner. This suggests that labor organizations can aggravate structural domination along lines of race, gender, and occupational status. Radical republicans should challenge the implicit assumption that workers are a monolithic group whose interests align beyond their antagonism with the owner class. Faced with this criticism, the theorist can claim that the misalignment of interests between workers stems from those who cannot isolate their private interests from the universal labor struggle. The intersectional concerns of the oppressed distract from the universal labor message, so should be abandoned. This ideological monism should be rejected. The other option is to create more deliberative forums for workers to discover common interests and articulate marginalized interests. The processes and institutions of political democracy would be deepened and extended to resolve the conflicts that arise from pluralism. It is the latter option that should be opted.

The flawed assumption lurking in radical republican accounts is the absence of conflict and plurality amongst the worker class. The assumption typically presents itself in a positive formulation. For Alex Gourevitch (2013: 607) the structural condition of being “pitted against each other” was the basis of solidarity amongst labor republicans of the nineteenth century. Marx makes a similar point when he argues that one of the sources of alienation is the process by which man is constituted as a wage laborer who is in competition with other men. There is something to be made of the structural condition of competition, which is an isolating, anxiety-inducing, and antagonizing experience. Mutual recognition of

this fact can be a uniting and empowering force. Yet, the point also conceals the myriad points of conflict and disagreement amongst not only waged workers but all those who are embedded in the wage economy, including the unemployed, temporarily employed, the so-called self-employed, and unwaged workers. The Wages for Housework movement called attention to precisely these segments of the economy. There is a pragmatic and normative aspect to this shift in perspective. Pragmatically, it takes seriously the changes that have been taking place in political economy. These are women's increased participation in the labor force, the shift from manufacturing to services in virtually all advanced capitalist democracies, and the disproportionate representation of marginalized groups in low-paid and precarious jobs. Normatively, it challenges the prized status of full-time waged labor and the ideal worker norm that privileges some workers over others.

Missing from radical republican accounts is a reckoning with structural factors like race and gender,⁹ as well as occupational status. Stratification along these lines can compound economic domination, as exclusionary institutions fail to track the interests of their marginalized members or fail to grant them equal recognition in deliberation. Take the example of contemporary Germany. Germany has kept in step with global trends in political economy, as services now make up an increasing part of the economy, a development that has overlapped with women's increased participation in the labor force. Yet, unlike the social democratic countries of Scandinavia, the male-breadwinner model has kept women at home for much longer. Rather, guest-worker programs have filled in the gap in labor shortages in the service industry (Thelen, 2012: 17-8). Women's participation in the labor market had the primary aim of supplementing the family income in times of economic insecurity. The dominance of blue-collar manufacturing jobs – often occupied by men – in Germany has been accompanied by a process of “bifurcation”, whereby core workers (typically male

⁹ See Rousselière, Frank and McCormick (2020, pp. 499–501)

manufacturing) enjoy generous benefits, decision-making power, and job security as opposed to peripheral workers (typically precarious women and migrants). The German system of co-determination has been lauded for institutionalizing workers' decision-making rights in corporate governance. Yet, as the labor force has bifurcated, co-determination has become "the institutional base of a tight economic community of face between managers and core workforces" (Streeck and Thelen, 2005: 32). The social and political economic context of Germany thus sheds a new light on co-determination. The system has had implications that have not been noticed by political theorists interested in workplace democracy. An intersectional perspective suggests that co-determination has granted control only to some workers over their workplaces and the economy but not others. Thus, in Germany, the system has reflected and perhaps even multiplied the structural inequalities amongst workers themselves. The upshot is that collective bargaining and workplace democracy have disproportionately benefited elite workers over peripheral ones.

Implications of intersectionality for labor organizing

I have argued that labor organizing bridges the gap between radical republican aspirations and goals. Economic domination, understood in structural terms, requires that workers have control over their workplaces and the economy. This cannot be achieved without labor organizations. Yet, the implicit assumption of class-homogeneity has blinded radical republicans to the demands of intersectionality. Overlooking the challenges and possibilities of intersectionality puts the goal of *equal* non-domination in jeopardy. The gap between the ideals of our democratic institutions and the actual practice of democracy requires that radical republicans take intersectionality seriously. Insight from feminist political theory suggests that the interests of the oppressed fall by the wayside in deliberative settings (Sanders, 1997). These blind spots in the deliberative process serve to marginalize the most vulnerable of the oppressed, thus thwarting the emancipatory ideals of social movements (Crenshaw, 1991).

Feminist political theory gives us valuable insight into in-group differentiation, warning us of the perils of neglecting intersectionality for our democratic institutions. In her seminal work on intersectionality, Kimberly Crenshaw (1991) argues that saying which differences matter and which do not are themselves questions of power. Power manifests itself not only in who gets a seat at the table but whose voices are heard, believed and incorporated into policy. “Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both” (Crenshaw 1991: 1244). What counts as a gender problem or a race problem are inadequate in illuminating the lived experiences of intersectional identities. Policy and legislation with a unidimensional view of gender and race thus end up obscuring or exacerbating the problems that they purport to solve. To demonstrate this, Crenshaw conducts a qualitative study of battered women’s shelters in Los Angeles. Her findings show that organizations that lack an understanding of the unique challenges that women of color face fail to respond to their needs, and even worse, fail to fulfil their fundamental duty of helping women in need.

Deliberative settings often amplify the shortcomings of adopting a unidimensional view of domination. They do so by amplifying the voices of privileged participants and muffling the voices of the marginalized. As Lynn Sanders (1997) points out, deliberation is seldom deliberative or democratic:

Because dominance appears to be a function of status and the attributions of superiority that accompany it, distributing skills and resources for deliberation is unlikely to ensure more egalitarian and democratic discussions. Perhaps more obviously, neither is urging the discovery of a common voice likely to address the problems of inequality in group deliberations. (Sanders 1997: 369)

Deliberation does not take place in the sterile and controlled conditions of a laboratory experiment. As suggested by studies on juries, participants do not leave status inequalities and patterns of social oppression at the door when they arrive at the deliberation table (Sanders 1997). The privileged segment of the population is much more likely to possess the skills and resources needed for good deliberation. Moreover, the objective criteria of good deliberation – rationality and commonality – are biased towards those with social attributes historically associated with rationality and commonality. Hence, Sanders’s devastating point that allocating more skills and resources to the underprivileged is unlikely to make deliberation more democratic.

Labor organizing per se does not eliminate domination along multiple structural lines. In fact, labor organizations can be deeply undemocratic. So, deeper and more expansive deliberative and participatory platforms are needed to support the demands of plurality – of interests, modes of expression, and organization. We might need democratic models of talking and listening other than deliberation (Sanders suggests testimony), but there will likely be a lag between experimentation and institutionalization. And experiments abound, as workers organize against sexism and racism, demand stronger sexual harassment policies, and build new coalitions. What this might look like in practice is elaborated by Veronica Gago in her account of international women’s strikes (Gago, 2020). The first International Women’s Strike, which took place in 2017, mobilized half a million women, lesbians, trans people, and travesties. In 2018 and 2019 the numbers were 800,000. The strike mobilized movements – against femicide, LGBTQ, students, and the unemployed – that have been historically excluded from the labor movement. The strike tool was thus broadened not only in its constituents but also in its temporality. It extended beyond the traditional workday in recognition of the fact that the traditional workday does not match the reality of the working life of many. Work, for many, includes not only productive but also reproductive and

affective labor – the triple working day. This broadening, then, served the purpose of “giving visibility and value to forms of precarious, domestic, and migrant work” (Gago 2020:13).

The International Women’s Strike, told through Gago’s account, demonstrates the possibility of a democratic and truly inclusive labor movement.

Conclusion

In this paper, I elaborated the role of labor organizing for economic non-domination. Neo-republicans neglect exclusionary institutions for advancing the sectional interests of the disenfranchised. Both the exit and rule of law routes to economic non-domination overlook the social factors that facilitate (and hinder) the protections and regulations that neo-republicans advocate for. Radical republicans fare better, in adopting an oppositional view of politics and advocating for worker-led institutions like workplace democracy. But they overlook a crucial theoretical step, which is the importance of labor organizations. Labor organizing is the primary mechanism for achieving radical republican goals like workplace democracy. The exclusionary institutions of the marginalized, like labor unions, non-union labor organizations, and social movements provide deliberative platforms for workers to discover and articulate the nature of their domination. They help their members develop alternative epistemic frameworks and modes of expression that challenge the status quo and assert the marginalized as equal participants in the political process. In the process, they facilitate the emergence of a collective subject with goals, judgments, demands, and desire for freedom. Historically, however, the labor movement has not lived up to the ideal of equal non-domination. The danger remains that emancipatory social movements perpetuate inequalities along structural lines like gender, race, and occupational stratum. Given this, radical republican theory should conceptualize non-domination in intersectional terms.

This paper does not solve all the theoretical and political problems involved with achieving economic non-domination. Specifically, more research is needed to think through the institutions, norms, and practices that best promote an intersectional kind of economic non-domination. We also need to think more deeply about what a truly democratic and pluralistic labor organizing looks like.

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