

On the Future World of Work
Delivered at the UNI Global Union 5th International

Thank you Ruben. And thanks especially to Christy Hoffman, and Phillip Jennings, for focusing on this extremely important topic. It is a great honor to have been invited to speak before such an important group of leaders in the labor movement.

As Ruben said in his very kind introduction, I am Barry Lynn, and I run the Open Markets Institute in Washington. Yes, we do fight the big tech corporations. We've been doing so for a while, at least ten years now. And we remain very much in the vanguard of this fight, our research and writings very much shaping how policymakers and regulators understand the problem. Yet today my talk will focus more on our common history. Because if we are to win the 21st century, we must understand how we won in 20th and 19th centuries. We must fully understand the ideas and principles the revolutions of 200 years ago established.

So let me start by speaking a single word – “Liberty.”

The revolutionaries in America fought to win “Liberty.” So too the revolutionaries in France.

Together these two great victories, of people over power, laid the foundation for the modern era of open societies, centered on citizenship, and on the dignity of the individual.

Nowadays we talk more of democracy than of Liberty. But it was these victories to establish Liberty that made democracy possible.

Liberty to think and believe as one wishes. Liberty to participate fully in all political decisions. Liberty to own one's own self, in all economic life. Without these Liberties, democracy is impossible. Community, true solidarity is impossible.

And yet... Today we face the greatest threat to our Liberties, and the Liberties of our families, and our communities, since – if you live in Europe – the World War. Since – if you live in the United States – the Civil War.

This threat to our Liberty is not Donald Trump. It is not Brexit or right-wing nationalists. These are mere symptoms of the threat, mere tools of those who threaten.

What threatens our most fundamental Liberties is concentration of economic power. Today in America, in Britain, in Europe, around all the world, economic power is more concentrated than any time in the modern Era.

Consider... When you go to buy milk, bread, chicken, a bag of lettuce – you find one or two sellers, down the whole supply chain. When you go to buy drugs, health care, a hospital bed for a broken body – again, you find one or maybe two sellers. Electricity, broadband, gas for your car – one or two sellers.

And when you go to sell? Your work? Your crops? Your ideas? You find maybe just two, often just one, buyer.

Economists, like Thomas Piketty, tell us inequality is due to finance. Many here in this room say inequality is because they weakened our unions. Both are correct.

But there is another factor – a huge factor. There are no more open markets, in which to buy what we need, in which to sell what we make, including our labor. There is only autocratic private corporate power, dictating prices to us, dictating terms to us.

Let me give you some figures. These are from the United States. Wages – new studies show wages in America are down twenty plus percent, over one generation. Twenty plus percent! Due to monopoly over the markets where we sell our labor.

Health Care - new studies show the average family in America pays \$10,000 per year extra, ten thousand dollars extra! due to monopoly.

And the bosses, what do they do, with these super profits? These profits made by driving down our wages? And driving up our prices? They buy the land under our families' homes, and raise our rents. Again and again, year after year, they raise our rents.

They fleece us at work. They fleece us in their stores. And they fleece us as we sleep.

And then they use these super-profits of monopoly to buy our governments, and to overthrow our democracies.

The entire modern experiment in democracy, achieved with so much struggle – so much blood. Today an oligarchy rules, a few hundred families. And the main source and means of their power, their ever more autocratic power, is private corporate monopoly.

But let's be honest, the problem is worse even than that. All that was coming true even before the rise of Google, Amazon, Facebook, Uber.

Today, just as we awake to our monopoly problem, the masters are already well into stage two of concentrating power and control over us. The stage of monopolization powered by big tech, big data, what they call artificial intelligence.

This stage in which a few immense platform monopolists, know everything about every one. And the worker and citizen knows nothing about them, or anything else really.

This stage in which a few immense platform monopolists enjoy the power to pit us all against all, in battles regulated not by our public markets, not by our public government. But only by their private algorithms, for their private benefit.

And now – these few omniscient, omnipotent platform monopolists are consolidating their control over our news.

A week ago today, in Washington, I hosted a conference, at which the CEO of News Corp, who works for Rupert Murdoch, and the CEO of the New York Times, agreed, about one thing.

They agreed that Google and Facebook are Killing the News, not only by pushing “Fake News” and tribalist propaganda onto us. But by stealing all the advertising revenue that publishers use to pay for reporters and editors, and shoving that coin into their own pockets.

Are any of you paying attention to China? To how the government there is wielding these same technologies to establish a system of “social credit” scoring? To manipulate the

actions of the individual in ways George Orwell never dared imagine?

Who do you think engineered that system for President Xi? American and European super-corporations. Where do you think those super-corporations plan to deploy those technologies next?

So how did this happen? How did we let this happen?

We have heard a lot of talk the last two days about neoliberals. And indeed we all know that Thatcher and Reagan first went after our unions, targeting our ability to concentrate our own power.

But from the first we understood exactly what they were doing. And we went on fighting. Every day, every moment we went on fighting. And it's a glorious thing, this battle, which you here in this room are leading.

But we also missed something. Something fundamental. What we missed was the other half of the neoliberal revolution. Their attack on antimonopoly law. The laws we use to prevent the few from concentrating absolute power and control over us.

The other half of the story is that the neoliberal revolution made it far easier for the masters to organize their power, for the masters to organize their control.

In 1776 – under the banner of Liberty – Americans aimed first and foremost to break the unions of the masters. To break the

great monopolies of church, of monarchical government, of monopoly trading corporations.

And to establish, in their places, Liberty to think, Liberty to share equally in all rule, Liberty to own ones own self.

When Reagan and Thatcher came to bust our unions they also took away the antimonopoly laws we had used for two centuries, to break the unions of the masters.

And we let them. We let them simply take away the sharpest sword ever fashioned by the people to fight autocracy. The idea of Liberty. And the antimonopoly laws shaped to protect those liberties.

We let them because we did not see, did not understand. Because they hid what they were doing in an entirely new language, an entirely new economic ideology. Designed not only to disguise the source of their power, but to give them terrifying new license, to do with us as they please.

Why do you think they called it neo-liberalism? They call it neo-liberalism because their aim is to redefine the idea of liberty. In place of Liberty for the many from the few, they define a liberty in which the few are made free to master the many.

Brothers and sisters, my fellow citizens, we shall sweep these bosses, these cheap tawdry gold-plated masters, from before us.

We shall rebuild our democracies, rebuild our communities, rebuild our families, rebuild the love we have for one another.

We shall rebuild from the ground up, with the bricks the Rev. Barber spoke of yesterday.

But we will do so only, only after we first rebuild our own selves, our own conception of our own selves.

We are not consumers, as they define us. We are not mere seekers of stuff, as they define us. We are not even merely workers, fighting merely for workers rights, as they define us.

We are Citizens, and we seek nothing more, nor less, than a Citizen's Liberty. Liberty to think freely. To share equally in all rule. To own our own selves absolutely.

So know that our fight is also for Liberty. Use all the tools designed to make Liberty. Especially the laws forged to fight monopoly. And we will reconnect ourselves with all others who seek Liberty. All the others who now fight concentrated power. All our future allies.

The small business owner and farmer. The doctor and scientist. The musician and author. The professor and engineer. Even the small investor and petty executive.

All now feel the chains of monopoly around their necks. All wait for labor to take the lead. All wait for you to take the lead, against Monopoly, for Liberty. Labors' natural and necessary lead in the fight for Liberty.

Help the people of the world, see the sword of Liberty, in the form of antimonopoly law, already in our hands.

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