

SOLIDARITY

CO-OP ECONOMIES

Spain, Italy, Argentina



MONDRAGON, SPAIN

Once Spain's poorest region, Mondragon's cooperatives were initiated as a strategy for economic and cultural survival of people in the country's Basque region. Today, Mondragon is one of Spain's most stable economies, and is home to a system of over 100 cooperatives that provide over 75,000 jobs. as well as cooperative insurance, trade schools, universities, and research and development organizations.

EMILIA-ROMAGNA, ITALY

Emilia-Romagna has a population roughly the size of Los Angeles, but unlike LA, 2 out of every 3 residents are members of at least one of 7,500 cooperatives, 5,000 of which are worker cooperatives. Cooperatives are a mainstay of the region's economy, contributing 30% of its gross domestic product. Italy also has spearheaded the development of "social cooperatives" that, among other things, provide opportunities for work, dignity, and mainstream living for people with mental illness or disabilities as well as cooperative livelihoods for those



ARGENTINA

After the collapse of the Argentine economy in 2001, jobless workers saw thousands of factories shuttered and empty. To many of them, it made no sense to let their former workplaces lie cold and vacant while they were out of work and already knew how to run the business and the machines.

One by one, they began to occupy the factories and restart production

as worker-owned cooperatives, resulting in more than 180 cooperatives employing over 10,000 workers. The story of these events is beautifully depicted in the documentary, **The Take**.



EQUITY

WORKER PROFILES

why would I start or join a worker cooperative?

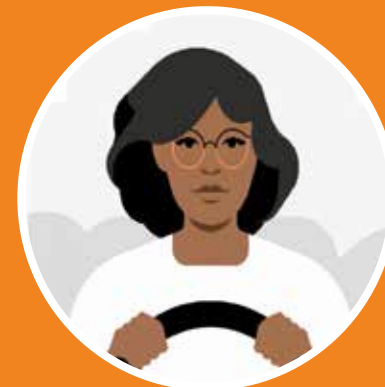
LOW-WAGE WORKER

Maybe you are in a tough field like home care that pays low wages but is what everyone nowadays calls an "essential worker" and you are looking to get better wages, training, and the respect that you deserve. **Cooperative Home Care Associates** is based in the South Bronx, is a home-care cooperative, and its the largest worker cooperative in the country. They started with 12 people in 1985 and now have more than 2,000 members. They also train 600 people, mostly women, to do this work and then earn better pay with better working conditions than most of their peers in the field.



GIG OR PLATFORM WORKER

Nowadays, more and more platform or gig workers have the responsibilities of employees without any of the rights and benefits. **Co-op Cycle** is a network of bike courier cooperatives across Europe who combine technology and democracy to improve their jobs, their pay and their lives. Across the U.S., platform cooperatives are emerging to serve workers in industries including driving and delivery, care work, and the arts.



FRIENDS WITH A PASSION

Some of the largest and most established worker cooperatives in the U.S. started with as few as three friends who sought to solve a problem or feed a passion together. Examples include the network of **Arizmendi Bakeries** in the Bay Area presently owned by 200 worker-owners and **Equal Exchange**, which now has over 130 worker-owners as well as an aligned network of small farmer organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the United States.



OPPORTUNITY

JUST TRANSITION

making the switch to a cooperative solution

CO-OP CONVERSIONS

A lot of business owners don't know that selling their business to their employees to form a worker cooperative is even an option. Eileen Michaels, founder of a Yard and a Half Landscaping in Waltham, MA, already ran her business with open books and profit-sharing, and also involved her employees in decision-making. In her case, converting the business to a cooperative owned by the workers was not a big leap. Workers assumed ownership in 2013 and as a result, preserved a locally-owned, safe, just and democratic workplace in an industry where workers often face exploitation, wage theft, and hazardous working conditions. Today, Yard and a Half worker-owners continue to enjoy learning new skills, collaboration, and sharing in the profits derived from their labor.



OUT OF STRUGGLE, A NEW WAY TO WORK

Not every employer respects and cares as much about their workers as Eileen Michaels. When the Republic Windows factory closed its doors in the wake of a 2008 financial scandal, the workers occupied the plant and kept it open, only to have it bought by another irresponsible owner. Through a combination of their own tenacity to fight for the right to buy the business, union and community support, and **The Working World's** labor-friendly financing, the same workers who occupied the factory in 2008 became its owners in 2012. Together, they overcame many obstacles and are now operating successfully as the **New Era Windows** worker-owned cooperative.



OWNERSHIP

DISTRIBUTED

TRANSFORMATIVE



When a group of skilled artisans in Rochdale, England were suddenly thrown into poverty by the Industrial Revolution they decided that cooperatives were the key to their economic survival. These 7 principles that guided their work have been sustained by cooperatives some form or another for over 175 years.

WHAT IS A WORKER CO-OP?



A worker cooperative is a business that is owned by the people who work there.

Unlike a traditional business, no one can own a larger share of the business or have a bigger say in decision-making.

Worker co-ops are democratic. Members vote on key decisions on the basis of one share, one vote.

And, when there is a profit, the worker-owners decide how much to invest in the business and how much to distribute to the workers on the basis of their labor contribution to that success.



THERE ARE PLACES IN THE WORLD TODAY

Where worker co-ops play a dominant role in the economy and are living laboratories of what is possible in the United States



THERE ARE MOMENTS IN U.S. HISTORY

when desperation, inspiration, mutual aid, and democratic endeavor have produced large-scale cooperative economies

RECONSTRUCTION

1863-1877

Born out of necessity, mutual aid, and democratic vision, African-American cooperatives are as old as Reconstruction, as described by Jessica Gordon Nembhard, author of *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*.

KNIGHTS OF LABOR

1879-1886

The Knights of Labor made forming cooperatives one of their primary strategies towards a long-term goal of creating a "cooperative commonwealth" where workers would lead the economy on principles of cooperation and solidarity.

GREAT DEPRESSION 1929-1933

During the Great Depression, in California alone, self-help cooperatives provided livelihood for more than 300,000 people and involved over 1.3 million people in more than 30 states. Most of the members were blue collar workers who joined forces to produce what was needed for their communities and families.

SEEDS OF CHANGE TODAY

hopeful signs of a burgeoning cooperative movement are shooting up across the United States today — from a dynamic financial cooperative to a recovered factory to local, regional and national networks and infrastructure for cooperative development and resilience.

