

# CHOKEPOINTS IN THE CLOUD: THEORIZING WORKER POWER THROUGHOUT THE CLOUD COMPUTING SUPPLY CHAIN


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let's short  
circuit the  
cloud

# PREFACE

Chokepoints are “*sites that construct or ‘choke’ the flows of resources, information, and bodies upon which contemporary life depends*” (Carse et al. 2023).

We use this definition to imagine how data centers can be conceptualized as chokepoints in cloud infrastructure.

This zine is based on ongoing academic explorations of Anoolia Gakhokidze & Sucheta Ghoshal, in creative collaboration with Devon Castillo and Gwyneth Balite.

If you have any questions or feedback, please shoot a message to [annygakhokidze@gmail.com](mailto:annygakhokidze@gmail.com)

A. G. is a former software engineer and is currently a United Auto Workers (UAW) 4121 member in her capacity as a PhD Student at University of Washington. She also used to organize with Tech Workers Coalition (San Diego). These ideas originated from her experience with labor organizing in tech and desire to understand differential power of tech workers and others who maintain the digital world

A.G. is interested in collaborating with anyone who has similar concerns and goals of building worker power and holding Big Tech accountable.

This work is meant to be useful to those involved in labor or social movement organizing around tech.

# CITATIONS

Cloud is material. Those who maintain and support the internet know it. To keep this zine grounded, most of the images of computing infrastructure (warnings about fiber optic cables, substations, data centers) were taken in Washington state, where A.G. resides.

No work is produced in a vacuum. It's a product of all acknowledged resources, fleeting inspirations, as well as friends and family who engage with our ideas.

Scan the following QR code for citations, attributions, and more.



[annygakh.github.io/chokepoints](https://annygakh.github.io/chokepoints)



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Canada

# WHICH BEST DESCRIBES YOU?



1

I WANT TO UNDERSTAND MY  
POWER AND GET INSPIRED  
BY OTHER WORKERS

2

I WANT TO PUSH BACK  
AGAINST BIG TECH AND AI

3

# LET US THEN

UNDERSTAND  
DATA CENTERS'  
ECONOMIC  
SIGNIFICANCE

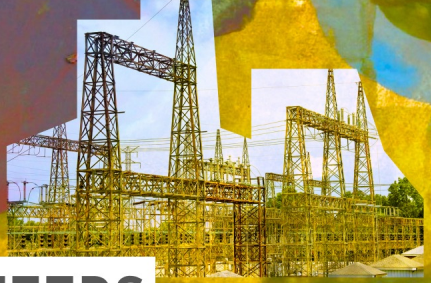
LEARN HISTORY  
OF OTHER  
WORKERS

STRATEGIZE

# WHAT IS A CLOUD

**ELECTRICITY**

MIN



**DATA CENTERS**



**WATER**



**SHIPYARDS**

# COMPUTING SUPPLY CHAIN?

INES

**NATURAL  
RESOURCES**

**LOGISTICS &  
TRANSPORTATION**



**TECH FIRMS**



# ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

## Viewing data centers as logistics facilities

**REVENUE FROM CLOUD SERVICES WORLDWIDE  
TOTAL IN 2023-2024: \$171.8 BILLION**

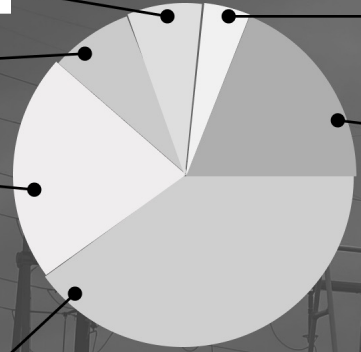
Source: Gartner, Inc.

9% Alphabet - Google Cloud Platform

7.2% Alibaba Group -  
Alibaba Cloud

23.9% Microsoft Azure

37.7% Amazon AWS



Cloud services are everywhere:



17% of Amazon's revenue comes from AWS, and the rest from its retail services.

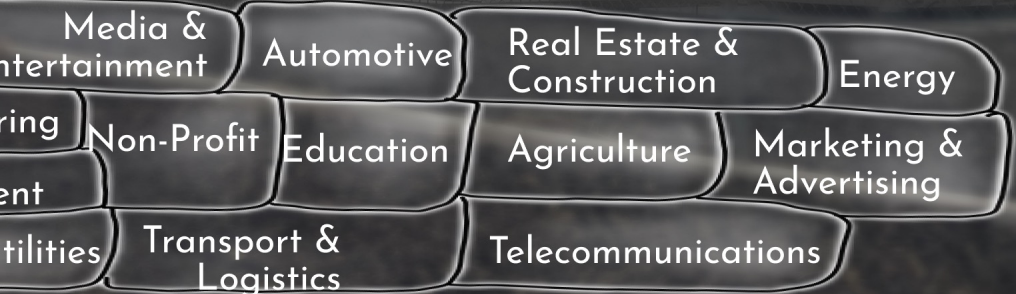
But, the retail service runs on AWS!

4.1% Huawei


17.9% Others

What if we view data centers as logistics facilities because of how many different relations and territories they mediate (as proposed by Nelson and Notley 2019)?


How could we learn new organizing tactics from truck drivers, warehouse workers, dockworkers?



# SOME HISTORY OF LABOR ACTIONS



Black dockworkers in Durban have a long history of solidarity actions. These workers combined leftist and anti-racist ideologies into tangible action of boycotting ships. As early as 1935 these dockworkers refused to load food supplies on a ship bound for Italian fascist troops in Ethiopia. These kinds of actions continuously reverberated throughout other southern African ports. (Source: Historian Peter Cole, see below)





Warehouse workers in Northern Italian sectors have organized events like 24-hour general strikes (March 2013), impacting operations of multinational express delivery companies. Their other victories include a "Cappuccino strike", which involved boycotts by workers and their allied community members. Comprising of a largely migrant workforces, organizers have drawn widely on community networks for their support. (Source: Carlotta Benvegnù and Niccolò Cuppini, see below)

These stories are cited from the following source:  
Choke points: Logistics workers disrupting the

# AMONG LOGISTICS WORKERS

In the past, Amazon warehouse workers in Poland have improvised an operation slowdown in a department they identified as a bottleneck for processing orders. They carried out their action in solidarity with striking warehouse workers in Germany. Recognizing each other as allies, and their employer as a common enemy, their impact transcended borders. (Source: Workers and organizers at Amazon in Poland, see below)



These instances of logistics workers organizing and causing disruptions to the circulation of capital inspire us to think about how workers in the cloud computing supply chains can advance their worker power and stand in solidarity with interconnected struggles. In other words, let's short circuit the cloud!

# SHORT CIRCUITING

This photo was taken in Quincy, WA during A.G.'s research fieldwork. This is a substation that was built to support the growing data center industry.

What kind of outages can be caused by a strike in one data center? Five?

How long will a digital app be offline for if an on-call DevOps/SRE team stops working?

What is the worst kind of disruption you can cause with a coordinated action in your line of work?

What kind of digital services will shut down if a route to a data center is blocked?

# THE CLOUD

What kind of service outage have broken undersea cables or damaged fiber cables caused in the past?

Write here...

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How much revenue will be lost if office tech workers and data center technicians coordinate a strike?

# COALITION BUILDING

Security guards in a data center coordinate with truck drivers

## DATA CENTERS



Dockworkers and data center technicians coordinate

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## SHIPYARDS



How should we build coalitions? What coordinated actions might be possible between various sites below?

center  
ers . . .  
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# LOGISTICS & TRANSPORTATION

data center technicians and  
ite Reliability Engineers (SREs)  
coordinate . . .  
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# TECH FIRMS



Office tech workers and . . .  
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# OVERCOMING

How can we expand worker power capacity of contract workers?

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Contract workers at times have pre-determined work agreements, and few of the same benefits (e.g. health care insurance, professional development time), while still being required to complete the same tasks as full-time employees.

How can we creatively support labor actions of those in Big Tech, as they fear retaliation and deportation?

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Amazon has been a top recipient of H-1B visas for the last few years, with other companies (Alphabet, Microsoft, Meta) trailing behind in top 13.

How can we improve labor organizing tactics amidst academic research aimed at making nodes withstand failure?

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The field of computer science continues it's research on making systems redundant, constantly available, and able to withstand node failure?

# OBSTACLES

The background image is of petrified wood located near the Columbia river (WA), a natural resource many data centers use for cooling their systems.

How can we overcome narratives of meritocracy?

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Beliefs in meritocracy pose barriers to solidarity among workers supporting digital services, cloud, and the Internet.

How might we build capacity to continue developing worker power as material conditions change?

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Chokepoints are not fixed in time, e.g. railroad strikes have not been effective at increasing worker power, as ILWU (International Longshore and Warehouse Union) Director, Peter Olney points out.

Material conditions change and so might the capacity for disruption and disturbance.



We feel immensely inspired by No Azure for Apartheid (NOA) group, as well as others: #NoTechForICE, Collective Action in Tech, Tech Workers Coalition.

Contact [anngakhokidze@gmail.com](mailto:anngakhokidze@gmail.com) with any questions, comments, feedback, or if you just want to chat about this work!

Thank you for reading this.  
In solidarity, A.G.