

The Worker

Knowledge is power



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CASUALISATION OF WORK: THE MODERN FORM OF SLAVERY

INTRODUCTION

“Casual labour” was in the news recently, when Cosatu organised nationwide protest marches against Labour Brokers on 7 March 2012. An estimated 200 000 people participated in the marches in centres across the country, which shows that the *casualisation of labour* has become a burning issue for ALL WORKERS.

WHAT IS “CASUALISATION?”

Casual work or casual labour is nothing new. However, in the past it was usually limited to specific situations. For example, during the harvesting season, farmers would employ casual (that is, temporary) labour to assist the permanent farmworkers to harvest their crops. Similarly, during peak shopping periods, like Christmastime, most large retail firms would hire casual staff (often, students) to help out the permanent staff.

However, in recent years, firms throughout the world – not just in South Africa – and in many industries, have begun more and more, to reduce their permanent staff members and replace them with casual staff. In other words, what used to be permanent jobs have now become “casualised jobs.”

WHY DO BOSSES PREFER CASUAL TO PERMANENT WORKERS?

There is a simple reason to explain why bosses are turning permanent jobs into casual jobs – *casual workers are cheaper and easier to exploit!* It is a policy that enslaves the workers.

- Bosses do not have to provide casual workers with benefits such as paid annual leave and sick leave or with pension/provident fund benefits.
- They can dismiss their casual staff at practically any time they choose.
- They have no responsibility to the worker, for his benefits or long term future.
- They are mainly interested in getting as much out of their workers as possible, without spending money on training them.
- They can get casual workers to do harmful, dangerous work without the proper training.
- They do not have to pay severance packages or go through lengthy and “fair” retrenchment procedures when they dismiss casual workers.
- They can adopt a “no work no pay” rule, no matter what the reason for a worker’s absence is (eg, sickness)

PROBLEMS FACED BY CASUALISED WORKERS

There are numerous disadvantages suffered by casual workers. For example:

- The labour law does not adequately protect them
- Most casual workers do not have the protection that unionisation might offer.
- They can be compelled to work additional hours.
- They can be denied medical benefits and overtime pay, which will have adverse effects on their health and that of their families.
- They can be forced to suffer:
 - Wages below the poverty line;
 - No proper contracts of employment;
 - No transport home when working night shifts;
 - Doing the work of permanent workers without enjoying the benefits.
- They are constantly under threat of instant dismissal.
- All workers face the threat of casualisation. This means that their position as workers is weakened

The problems faced by casualised workers extend to their families and communities as well. Thus, the problem of casualisation is not simply a problem in the workplace; it is a national crisis facing the whole of society. EVERYBODY IS AFFECTED. Therefore, everybody should be part of the struggle to get rid of it.

LABOUR BROKERS

A labour broker is an agent who (for a fee) provides a firm with temporary or casual staff. Thus, the labour broker, not the firm, is regarded by the labour law as the casual staff's employer. Cosatu occupies a strange position. It has organised a nationwide protest march against labour broking, but is part of the tripartite alliance that governs the country. It is also part of NEDLAC, the partnership between business, organised labour, and government, which allows the use of labour brokers. This means that Cosatu is in a sense an opponent of itself! Just as strange, Minister of Higher Education, Mr Blade Nzimande, openly associated himself with Cosatu's call for a ban on labour brokers – yet, he is a member of the cabinet against which Cosatu was supposed to be protesting! It should be remembered that government (national, provincial and local) are all employers of staff. The fact that government wants to retain casualisation and the whole labour broking system shows that government are basically anti-worker.

THE POSITION OF THE UNITY MOVEMENT

In its Ten Point Programme, the Unity Movement demands the banning of labour brokers and the whole system of Temporary Employment Services, which circumvents legislation designed to safeguard the interests of workers.

The Unity Movement demands nothing less than

- the right of every person in the country to decent work;
- the total elimination of unemployment;
- the creation of decent work for all, which will mean:
 - state Industrialisation programmes and agricultural enterprises to ensure full and secure employment for all;
 - providing the necessary subsidies and other incentives essential to the creation of decent employment opportunities.
- The payment of living wages that are tied to the cost of living, and
- just benefits for all workers, with pensions, leave (ie, sick leave as well as an annual paid vacation period), maternity and paternity benefits guaranteed in labour and related legislation;
- a maximum 8-hour workday, with a maximum 40-hour workweek.
- An end to the inequality between the highest and the lowest paid employees.
- continuous, on-going employee training and development as part of a system that provides free, quality basic education for all.
- the narrowing of the distinction between manual and intellectual labour, such that the accompanying inequalities are eliminated.

WORKER CONTROL

An important demand of the Unity Movement is that workers of all branches of the economy shall have an active and conscious participation in planning and carrying out of the production and development plans of the country. In addition, there must be a democratically elected workers' committee in each workplace consisting of a specified minimum number of employees. The role of such a workers' committee will be to represent the interests of workers in that workplace, and to oversee key management and corporate decisions. Thus, the democratically elected workers' committee will be part of the firm's decision-making structure.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

As we tried to show above, casualisation of work is spreading like a cancer. All of us are affected, even those in permanent employment, as well as our families and communities. The bosses will continue to do everything in their power to weaken us as workers so that they can continue to grow their profits, and the government cannot be relied upon to fight the cause of the workers.

We need to do what works for us: WE NEED TO BUILD PEOPLES POWER IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND WORKERS POWER IN OUR WORKPLACES. What this means is setting up *independent* organisations in our communities and neighbourhoods and in the workplace. Where these already exist, we need to join them to strengthen them with our numbers, our participation and our support and solidarity for the cause. And we must ensure that our organisations are INDEPENDENT. Too often, we have allowed people like municipal councillors and other politicians who are part of the system of oppression to join our ranks. Also, we must not even think of joining organisations or structures set up by the government or councils (eg, ward councils) till we are strong enough to dominant such bodies.

This will not be easy. It will mean waging a struggle every bit as difficult as the anti-apartheid struggle was. But, as we saw with the anti-apartheid struggle, no force is too strong to withstand the sustained might of a people united.

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