



Precarious work – building PSI's Campaign Sandra Vermuyten – WOC 2014

I will be moderating this session and I will start by making an introductory statement on what we will be discussing this morning and what the expected outcomes of that discussion will be.

We want to identify various perspectives on precarious work, look at the links with other priorities/PSI campaigns, besides the sectoral dimension and potential coalition building. We will also present campaign images and messages and talk about potential campaign events and strategic opportunities.

The original meaning of the word "precarious" is "revocable", "uncertain" or "shaky". Nowadays however the term is used to describe the spread of insecure working and living conditions.

From flexibilisation to "flexploitation":

- Precariousness is more and more becoming a living situation that is not only characterized by material deficits, insecurity, adverse working conditions and lack of recognition, but above all by dwindling possibilities for people to make long-term plans;
- Precariousness is not a phenomenon occurring only on the fringes of society. Alongside the permanent exclusion from gainful employment and the increase in insecure working conditions there is a third focal point – the fear of falling down the social ladder and losing status among those groups of people who still have "normal" regular jobs;
- Depending on the age, type of household, sex, qualifications, region and nationality insecure employment is dealt with in very different ways. The younger and better qualified the employees are, the greater the hope of them managing to find permanent employment. The contingent worker or temp dreams of becoming a regular, salaried employee, but this dream only comes true for about 12% to 18% of these workers.

That is why such a promise of "normalization" is not realistic in terms of integration.

Precariousness also affects those groups of workers who have to a large extent always been excluded from a normal, regular job. Women working in what traditionally used to be female-dominated service sectors are now having to face competition from men. The precarisation of the working world of men often leads to a destabilization of the situation of women as additional income earners.

For many public service workers, precarious employment has become the harsh reality and goes hand in hand with discrimination of women, youth and migrant workers. We want decent work for young workers and real jobs – not mini-jobs or part-time underpaid contracts. We want a fair world, without modern day slavery and widespread discrimination.

Precarious jobs: Why and what?

- Government worldwide are shirking their legal obligations to workers by replacing permanent jobs with contract and temporary work;
- Precarious work is a means for employers to shift risks and responsibilities on to workers;

- Workers who are hired by an agency or subcontractor are in a precarious situation when it is unclear who should be held responsible and accountable for the rights and benefits of a worker.

General Characteristics of precarious work

- Temporary/part time;
- No social security/protection;
- No union;
- No living wages;
- No consultation;
- Greater risk of injury and ill health;
- Not decent.

Measures of Precariousness and Vulnerability

- Level of earnings;
- Level of employer-provided benefits;
Degree of regulatory protection;
- Degree of control or influence within the labour process;
- The sector in which workers are employed;
- The size of the enterprise in which they work;
- The non-standard nature of their employment contract;
- Their demographic circumstances.

The impact in the public sector

- Constraints on public budgets;
- Reductions in public sector employment;
- Cuts in pay and pensions;
- Cuts in social protection;
- increases in direct and indirect taxation;
- increases in pension age;
- Ongoing cuts are affecting employees working for the general interest, in health, social security, education, culture and arts, environment, energy, etc.;
- Threats to the autonomy of collective bargaining and democratic accountability.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON WOMEN

- Burden of unpaid care work;
- Strain on family and community relationships;
- Reduces chances of further education;
- Physical and mental health;
- Risk of injury and illness;
- Stress;
- Barriers to access medical treatment.

Please also allow me to share some examples from different regions and actions by PSI affiliates – that will be completed by contributions from the floor later on, including on young workers and labour migrants.

Over the past decade the labour market in EU states has been considerably affected by an increase in the number of flexible, mainly precarious jobs. These include contingent work and temping, fixed-term contracts and forced part-time work along with zero-contracts, mini- and

mid-jobs, dependent self-employment or state-subsidized work schemes (e.g. one-Euro-an-hour jobs).

The one thing all these forms of employment have in common is that although they enable people to stay above subsistence level, they cannot guarantee anybody's livelihood on a permanent basis.

In Korea, discrimination against precarious workers in the public sector is deeply entrenched and continues to grow due to a dangerous overemphasis on deregulation, cost cutting and maximisation of efficiency by the Korean government and public sector employers.

As part of its plan to reach a 70% employment rate, the government is expanding part-time jobs, starting with 3% of newly hired civil servants in 2014. These lower paid, lower-status jobs are targeted at women based on the assumption that women prefer part-time jobs so that they can balance their work and family life.

This policy will only deepen discrimination between men and women civil servants as well as have a negative impact on the quality of service by splitting up jobs that should be approached in a holistic manner and worsening civil servants' working environment.

In addition to the growing number of part-time civil servants, a vast number of workers in health care, transport, education, sanitation, emergency and other essential public services are also precariously employed.

The Sewol Ferry tragedy of April 16, 2014 shocked and saddened not only the people of Korea but the entire global community. The work of PSI to defend quality public services is based on the principle that people must come before profits.

From this perspective, the Sewol tragedy is all the more troubling, given that it has become clear that its roots lie in deregulation, expanded use of precarious workers, outsourcing and privatisation policies aimed solely at the maximisation of profits in complete disregard for citizens' safety.

Building the capacity of public service unions in Turkey to confront the negative effects of precarious work, especially on women and young workers, was facilitated through project cooperation. The project "Public sector restructuring and decent work" took place between 2010 and 2012.

Turkey is an increasingly hard place to be a trade unionist. The country's labour law does recognise trade union rights but severely limits them. Several categories of public sector employees have no right to organise. Collective bargaining in parts of the public sector was finally legalized in 2012, but significant barriers have been put in place that constrain genuine bargaining and local government workers remain without collective bargaining rights.

Within a very hostile environment, the unions were able to achieve the following:

- Collective bargaining agreements were signed which improved the conditions for workers in precarious employment,
- 21,138 precarious workers were recruited
- 6,000 outsourced workers had their temporary status turned to permanent

In Guatemala, PSI Affiliate SNTSG has been struggling for the regularization of precarious workers in the health services as their main objective in the last two years. At the moment of the second mission to Guatemala, they organized their congress at which the Minister of Health delivered a list of 21 800 precarious workers, working without paid leave and social security, who will be transferred to contract 011 type – regularized.

The minister also pledged the implementation of the collective agreement that was signed last year, including changes in salary and social security contributions. Until now, pension contributions were paid only on the base salary, the rest of the salary considered to be “bonus”. This led to extreme poverty for pensioners – this will not be the case anymore.

Also in Mauritius and in the Caribbean, precarious work is high on the agenda.

The Caribbean SUBWOC, held in Dominica on March 7th, of this year committee noted that in Jamaica and Barbados precarious work exists in almost all categories of work in the public service. The committee endorsed the recommendations that call for organisation and bargaining for precarious workers, as well as campaigning for an end to precarious work in the public service.

And there are many more examples...

We want to build on all of this work that is being done at national and regional level to build a global campaign against precarious work and for quality public services – for our members and for society at large.

Later today we will discuss the UNCSW and the work we have done there. One of the more challenging issues in relation to the MDGs is the absence of public services in the equation. Therefore we need to continue to build alliances, as PSI does for its trade, tax justice campaign and trade union rights.

This is why we have invited ActionAid UK to present the work they are doing on unpaid care work. Action Aid has been collaborating with PSI on many other campaigns and therefore we really welcome this opportunity.