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IS PART-TIME AND TEMPORARY WORK GOOD FOR WORKERS?

by Pamela Tellew

Many people believe that part-time and temporary work is good for workers because it allows them time off from the paid work force to have children or take care of family responsibilities, or it allows them to acquire additional work experience and skills.

A different, more critical view of part-time and temporary employment is presented in a new study published by 9to5, National Association of Working Women entitled *Working at the Margins: Part-Time and Temporary Workers in the United States*. While the 9to5 study acknowledges that many workers prefer part-time or temporary work, it shows that an increasing number of part-time and temporary workers would rather be working on full-time, permanent jobs. Moreover, part-time and temporary jobs pay lower hourly rates, provide fewer benefits and less opportunity for advancement and are designed to suit the needs of employers, not workers. More and more unions are viewing the growth of part-time and temporary employment as part of a larger scale employer offensive to create "union-free" workplaces. This article is a summary of the 9to5 study.

Growth of Part-time and Temporary Work -- Between 1968 and 1985, part-time employment increased at a faster rate than full-time employment. More than 25 percent of the new jobs created during the Reagan years are part-time jobs. 22% of all workers were part-time in 1984. Many part-time workers, 72% of them, work part-time by choice. But an increasing number of workers say they are working part-time only because full-time work is unavailable; their numbers increased by 60% between 1979 and 1984. During the same period the number of part-time workers who want to work only part-time increased only 6%.

It is estimated that 5 million workers spend some part of the year doing temporary work, which comprises about 2 percent of total employment. Many employers, most notably the federal government, have increased their use of temporary workers because they claim it offers more "management flexibility." As one bank executive explains: "My organization has used hundreds of temporary workers for years. This type of individual is hired as our own employee, but is hired knowing there is no promise of job security."

About two-thirds of all part-time and temporary workers are women. Nearly 30% of paid working women are employed part-time, compared to just 12 percent of men. Most part-time jobs are found in the service, sales, and clerical occupations. Most temporary jobs are clerical, but many are also in health care and industrial work.

Wages -- The average part-time worker earns about \$4.50 an hour, or 58 percent of the average hourly wage of full-time workers, which is \$7.80. About a quarter of all part-time workers (vs. only 5% of full-time workers) are paid minimum wage. To some extent, this pay gap is the result of the concentration of part-time workers in low-wage sectors of the economy, like service work and retail trade. But in many cases, part-time workers make significantly less than full-time employees performing the same job for the same employer. At a community college in Cleveland, for example, part-time clericals are paid \$4 to \$5 an hour, while full-time clericals doing the same work are paid \$7 to \$8 an hour.

Agency temporary workers are routinely paid less than permanent employees performing the same work. Wages are often not related to the skills of the worker or the skills possessed by the worker. Even temporary workers hired directly by companies (to avoid the fee charged by temporary agencies) are often paid less than permanent workers.

Benefits -- Cutting the cost of employee fringe benefits is a major reason why employers are using part-time and temporary, rather than full-time permanent workers. It is estimated that only 16 percent of all part-time workers receive any direct health

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coverage from their employer's health plans. Only 27 percent of employees who work half-time or less have pension coverage, compared to 50 percent of those who work more than half-time.

Some temporary agencies provide benefits to workers employed through the agency for a certain number of hours (usually 1000). But since temporary workers often have to work through several agencies to insure that they get enough work to make ends meet, few of them ever meet the minimum service required for benefits.

The federal government has increased its use of temporary workers because it can avoid paying them benefits. In 1985, civil service regulations were changed to allow the government to employ "temporary" workers for up to four years without providing benefits. (The previous limit was one year.) Then Donald Levine, the Director of the federal Office of Personnel Management (OPM), urged federal agencies to hire more temporary workers. Despite two OPM commissioned studies recommending that the 300,000 federal temporary workers be given benefits, the OPM refused, claiming that health benefits were too expensive.

Job Security and Advancement -- In some public sector agencies, "temporary" employees can work as long as ten years without seniority accruing. Although temporary help agencies recruit workers with the promise of career opportunities, most do not train workers for better permanent and full-time jobs. If anything, agencies instruct workers only in grooming, poise, and "attitudes becoming of a temporary worker." An agency temporary worker who is offered full-time work is often required to pay a sizable finder's fee to the agency.

Part-time workers have similar difficulties obtaining full-time, permanent work; they are often dissuaded or prevented even from applying for such work when it is available from their part-time employers and are treated just like outsiders in the application process. Other employers may hire their former part-time employees for full-time work and then grant them no seniority for what may add up to years of part-time work.

Threats to Unions and Full-time Workers -- Management sometimes increases the use of part-time and temporary workers as a threat to a union, or as a warning to full-time workers that their jobs are not secure. Since part-time and temporary workers are not often included in union bargaining units, increased use of such workers can be used by management to erode union bargaining power or to thwart organizing campaigns.

Only 7.3 percent of part-time workers belong to unions, compared to 20.4 percent of full-time workers. (Figures are not available to show union membership of temporary workers.) Part-time and temporary workers can be difficult to organize because of their constantly changing work schedules and changing job sites. But many unions have recognized the importance of organizing these workers, both for the workers' benefit and for the security of the union.

The Teamsters have negotiated agreements to limit use of part-time reservations agents at Pacific Southwest Airlines and also to guarantee full-time job protections for part-time workers. SEIU Locals 250, 535, and 790 have negotiated agreements to promote long term temporaries working for the City of San Francisco to permanent status. OPEIU Local 29 has negotiated an agreement with Blue Cross to restrict use of agency temporaries and instead employ laid-off Local 29 members, who are paid the same rate as permanent workers. UAW Local 2071 has negotiated an agreement to pay the full-time hourly rate and benefits for part-time workers at Wayne State University.

What Else Can Unions Do? -- The 9to5 study, *Working at the Margins*, recommends several legislative changes to help solve the problems faced by part-time and temporary workers. Union support for such legislation is crucial. Among the recommended changes are: requiring equal pay for part-time and temporary workers performing the same work as full-time employees, requiring equal benefits for full and part-time work, expansion of government programs to subsidize the cost of hiring full-time permanent workers with full benefits, prohibiting government contractors from hiring temporary workers for permanent work, and reforming labor law to facilitate union representation among part-time and temporary employees.

Working at the Margins can be ordered from: 9to5, National Association of Working Women, 614 Superior Avenue, N.W., Cleveland, Ohio 44113. The telephone number is (216) 566-9308.

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