

Nearly 700,000 Workers on Zero Hours Contracts While Working on Average 25 Hours Per Week Latest Ons Data Shows

Wednesday 25 February, 2015

There are fundamental problems with single market and whatever the European vision was on integration, harmony, economic advancement and political stability, what we currently have isn't it says GMB

GMB commented on the latest ONS figures on contracts with no guaranteed hours - zero hour contracts, 2014. *See notes to editors for headlines from ONS.*

Paul Kenny, GMB General Secretary, said "There are nearly 700,000 workers each week that have no guaranteed hours of work while working on average 25 hours per week.

What employers are offering workers has seriously decreased while workers often have little alternative but to accept what is on offer. Even skilled workers in the UK face being undercut while wages are stagnant or falling in real terms.

There are fundamental problems about Europe that we have to face up to. Whatever the European vision was on integration, harmony, economic advancement and political stability, what we currently have isn't it.

The free movement of labour and the single market were to be balanced by the social charter where all the people of Europe would live in freedom and with those in the poorer economies, benefitting from the harmonisation of standards across all member states. There were to be standards on workers protection, TUPE, excessive hours, health & safety, information and consultation and so many others were meant to keep labour exploitation in check.

That dream has been chipped away at for years. Right wing governments and employer have engineered massive change in the direction of the EU vision. Judgements in the European Courts like Viking and Laval were the green light to massive assaults on organised labour across Europe, but especially in the UK.

From Lindsey Oil refinery to food production we have seen workers recruited in certain member states by agencies and exploited. They were shipped in "literally" in order to undermine the terms and conditions of existing workers on those contracts. Both sets of workers have been let down by UK Government, the EU Commission and the European Court.

On exploitation – don't blame the exploited; damn those who exploit. This has been repeated up and down the country over recent years. And that is part of the discontent that UKIP turn into xenophobic rhetoric to win votes.

Look past the simplistic tag and face the challenge of exploitation. Let's reach out to those migrant workers not attack them, but organise and protect them.

Too many workers go to work fearful about exercising their basic rights. A new Labour Government working with the EU has to create a workplace without fear and equip the trade unions to enforce it. The challenge for Labour in government is to deal with exploitation and harassment of workers which it has ignored for too long. Collective rights are the key to unlock that challenge. Take away the shackles that enable trade union organization and we will show what enforcement is all about."

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Notes to editors

Headlines from ONS on contracts with No Guaranteed Hours - Zero Hour Contracts, 2014

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· Number of people employed on a "zero-hours contract" in their main job was 697,000 for October to December 2014, representing 2.3% of all people in employment. In the same period in 2013, this was 1.9% of all people in employment (586,000).

- The number of people saying they are employed on "zero-hours contracts" depends on whether or not they recognise this term. It is not possible to say how much of the increase between 2013 and 2014 is due to greater recognition rather than new contracts.
- Number of contracts that do not guarantee a minimum number of hours where work was carried out was 1.8 million for the fortnight beginning 11 August 2014. The previously published estimate was 1.4 million for the fortnight beginning 20 January 2014.
- The two estimates of contracts should not be directly compared. They cover different times of year so changes in the numbers may reflect seasonal factors.
- On average, someone on a "zero-hours contract" usually works 25 hours a week.
- Around a third of people on "zero-hours contracts" want more hours, with most wanting them in their current job, compared with 10% of other people in employment.
- People on "zero-hours contracts" are more likely to be women, in full-time education or working part-time. They are also more likely to be aged under 25 or 65 and over.

· Over half of businesses in Accommodation and Food Services and a quarter of businesses in Education made some use of no guaranteed hours contracts in August 2014.

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