

Conference Report

Vulnerable Workers and Precarious Work in a Changing World

Middlesex University London, 10-11 September 2012

On 10th and 11th September 2012, the 2nd International Conference on “Vulnerable Workers and Precarious Work in a Changing World” was held in London, at the Middlesex University Business School. The event, organized by the Association for International and Comparative Studies in Labour Law and Industrial Relations (ADAPT), The Marco Biagi Centre for International and Comparative Studies of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia (CSMB), and the National Association of Maimed and Injured Workers (ANMIL) and Middlesex University, was an important forum to discuss the contentious issues of precarious work and the protection of vulnerable workers. The purpose of the organizers was to provide an overview of the latest developments in the field of working conditions, with a focus on vulnerable workers, encouraging research and scientific debate on raising issues related to job insecurity.

It was a two-day conference during which plenary sessions and parallel workshop sessions were held. All presenters addressed specific and current aspects on the subject.

The first day began with an opening speech made by Headmistress of the Middlesex University, Anna Kyprianou, and Professor Malcolm Sargeant, Middlesex University. Eventually, ANMIL President, Franco Bettoni, briefly presented the Association explaining the reasons why ANMIL supported and participated to the conference. Set up in 1943, ANMIL represents and protects a particular category of vulnerable workers, that is those suffering occupational injuries.

The morning plenary session followed, coordinated by Professor Malcolm Sargeant, during which Dr. Birgit Köper, BAuA (Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) presented and discussed the issue of the impact of stress and workload on vulnerable workers in times of organizational restructuring, concluding that corporate restructuring leads to increased levels of stress and fatigue for all vulnerable workers, being them young or workers under 50. After that, Professor Anil Verma, University of Toronto, analyzed the potentials of ILO Convention No. 189 and the role it could have on the regulation of domestic work in India, Brazil and Canada, providing a detailed analysis of the national regulation.

The conference continued with two parallel workshops. One discussed working conditions and workers exploitation in Nigeria, vulnerability of temporary workers in New Zealand and labour market contradictions in Dubai. The other dealt with child labour and its related risks in Italy and in Europe, child labour in Nigeria and workers safety, examining the rates of accidents and fatal injuries at a global level for the year 2012.

In the afternoon, the plenary session chaired by Professor Charles Woolfson, Linköping University took place, during which Minawa Ebisui, Social Dialogue Technical Officer, Industrial and Employment Relations Department (ILO), provided a detailed and comparative analysis of the relationship between non-standard workers, collective bargaining and social dialogue in Argentina, Colombia, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Japan and South Africa. From the study carried out by Minawa Ebisui emerged that non-standard workers have limited scope to refer to the statutory provisions laid down in collective bargaining. Furthermore, she identified some other strategies and approaches to improve the working conditions and occupational status of vulnerable workers.

Afterwards, Gabriele Gamberini, Ph.D. Student at the International Doctoral School in Human Capital Formation and Labour Relations of Bergamo University, Cameron Roles, Lecturer at the Australian National University, College of Law and Davide Venturi, Adapt Senior Research Fellow, presented their findings on health and safety legislation in Australia and Italy, highlighting both the similarities and differences. In particular, they focused on the recent *Australian Road Safety Remuneration Act 2012*, on Italian OHS Consolidated Text NO. 81/2008 and on the vulnerable workers in confined spaces.

The first day of the conference ended with two seminars in which the speakers discussed a number of interesting issues: the reviewing of wage-setting mechanisms for vulnerable workers in Ireland during the economic crisis, green jobs and the destabilization of the labour market in Algeria. The second conference day opened with a plenary session chaired by Professor Eric Tucker, York University in which, David Walters, Professor of Work Environment and Director of the Cardiff Work Environment Research Centre, in the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University, examined labour inspection at the workplace, and its key to ensure increased levels of safety for workers. The session was closed by the Professor Charles Woolfson, who, through the analysis of two disasters occurred in offshore platforms, the *Piper Alpha* disaster in the United Kingdom and the *Deepwater Horizon* in the U.S., underlined the failure and exceptional character of legislation in the field of safety on offshore platforms and the preference given to profit over workers and environmental safety.

During the second plenary session, chaired by Dr. Maria Giovannone, Adapt Senior Research Fellow with an interests in the issues of health and safety at work, Felicity Lamm, Associate Professor and Employment Relations Co-Director of the Occupational Health and Safety Research Centre, AUT New Zealand, exposed the results of her study started in 1987 on health and safety legislation in New Zealand and on the evolution of the New Zealand Department of Labour. The conference carried on with the presentation of Professor Suzanne Jamieson, University of Sydney, examining the accident happened in the *Pike River Coal Mine* where on the 19th November, 2010 an explosion killed 29 miners. The disaster was the starting point to investigate the hazardous conditions in which some workers – particularly subcontracted workers – are forced to work. In the afternoon two workshops were held. One workshop dealt with the contentious issue of discrimination in the workplace and, in particular, Barbara Winkler, Kunz Schima Wallentin Attorneys at Law, Vienna, analyzed the issue of discrimination and prejudice suffered by transgender people at the workplace. The other was dedicated to the disability and reintegration in the labour market. During this session, coordinated by ANMIL President Franco Bettoni and Dr. Maria Giovannone, Dr. Giorgi Amiranashvili, a Master's degree student of the Faculty of Law at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi, examined Georgian legislation on disabled workers and their levels of protection. Afterwards, Professor Sargeant and Dr. Giovannone concluded with an examination on disability legislation in the UK and Italy, and on the number of disabled people in the two countries, which demonstrated that the phenomenon is more prevalent in the UK. The session ended with the intervention of Dr. Alessandra Innessi, Ph.D. Student at the International Doctoral School in Human Capital Formation and Labour Relations of Bergamo University. She introduced ANMIL (National Association of Maimed and Injured Workers) illustrating its mission, functions and projects concerning the re-insertion of disabled people in the labour market.

The conference was concluded with a focus on precarious work. The conclusion of the two-days Professor Eric Tucker was given the opportunity to provide a concluding speech at the end of the two-day conference, during which he presented his study on the importance of giving more voice to precarious workers in the regulation of workplace hazards, and Professor Guy Standing, University of Bath, who stated his theory of the creation of a Precariat Charter to protect temporary workers and making them Citizens.

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