



Trades

**TEMP
WORKERS**
Deserve a



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BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION
TRADES DEPARTMENT, AFL-CIO

The IBEW, the Building and Construction Trades Department (BCTD), AFL-CIO, and other unions are waging a nationwide campaign against temporary hiring agencies that position themselves as hiring halls without unions for millions of workers across the United States. The unions aim to expose the labor abuses committed by temporary agencies and roll back the damage they have done to wages and living standards.

“With the demand high for [construction] workers to offset the labor shortage, construction firms are looking for an alternative to union organizing efforts,” said International President J.J. Barry, who has assigned Ron Burke, director of the IBEW Construction Organizing Department, to serve as a member of the BCTD’s National Temp Campaign Steering Committee. “These temporary agencies position themselves as the answer by offering on-demand labor, but without a voice for the workers or the training, quality and safety that union workers bring to the job. That’s why this effort is so important,” added President Barry.

When the campaign was launched in April, union organizers in 26 states blitzed 131 temporary agency offices and 182 jobsites, distributing educational brochures to union workers and surveying workers who had been dis-

patched by temp agencies. The strong response of local unions and union activists enabled campaign workers to handbill nearly 8,000 union members, discuss the temp agency danger with 2,000 of them, and distribute liter-

Put Heat On 'Nonunion Hiring Halls'

ature to 1,284 temp workers, more than 500 of whom were interviewed.

Union organizers estimate that the construction/industrial temporary agency industry has more than tripled in size during the past decade from a \$4 billion to a \$15 billion per year business. They have identified approximately 450 temporary agencies that place workers in the con-

struction industry. Since the early 1990s, those agencies have been increasing at a steady rate. They dispatch more than 250,000 workers each day (a figure equal to 20 percent of the total number of union members in the construction industry) to open shop construction firms, supply labor to both basic and mechanical contractors, and reap billions in revenue.

"They [temporary hiring agencies] are members of the [anti-labor] Associated Building Contractors (ABC)," said Burke. "Some temp agencies try to weed out applicants and minimize the contractor's exposure to liability to labor law violations because the agency, not the contractor, is the employer of record. For

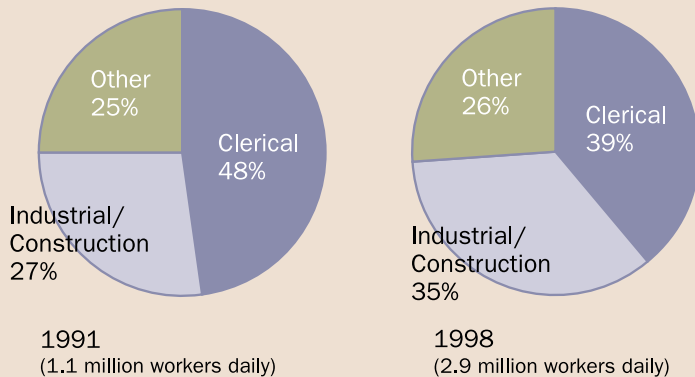
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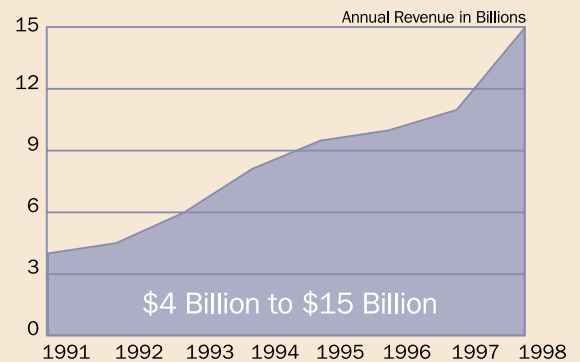
'Nonunion Hiring Halls'

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Temporary Workers By Occupation, 1991-1998



Growth of Temps In Industrial And Construction Work



instance, a union man or woman will go to a temp agency, but can be rejected with impunity because the temporary agency is viewed as being responsible for making the hiring decision. These acts allow temp agencies to free their open-shop clients of traditional employer-employee liabilities.”

Temporary agencies allow nonunion contractors to cut their regular payroll by as much as one-third, as they supply workers only when they are needed. A steady supply of ready workers allows nonunion contractors to compete more effectively with union signatories, which depend upon union hiring halls the same way.

Burke said that Local 347, Des Moines, Iowa, is currently engaged in a legal battle with a temporary agency over the agency’s record of abuses in its hiring practices for the construction industry. A Local 347 representative said the ongoing litigation prevents details of the case from being disclosed at this time.

The campaign also seeks to show workers how union membership is a far better alternative than life as a construction temp. These agencies charge their clients 30 percent to 50 percent more than they pay the workers. Workers are often not paid for time spent waiting in

the agency’s office and are often charged for check cashing and transportation services. Workers are sometimes sent to jobs where they face safety hazards they are not trained to handle. These temporary agencies do not allow their employees to have a voice at work through a union.

“Our goal in this campaign is to organize workers referred by temp agencies and recruit them into union membership,” says Burke. “We also plan to target and unionize contractors who utilize temp agencies and to inform the general public of the problems created by these practices, as well as the contributions that building trades unions make to their communities.”

Burke said the only way to curb the threats posed by these temp agencies is to expose the damage they do to the construction industry in general and the building trades unions in particular. These temporary agencies hire electricians, carpenters, laborers, sheet metal workers, plumbers, painters, masons, roofers and ironworkers. “Temporary agencies are determined to undermine unions. They need to feel the heat for violations of existing laws while new laws must also be passed that limit their ability to exploit workers and undermine industry standards.”

