Precarious work – give your views

THIS SPRING the government opened a total of four consultations on changes to employment law aimed to strengthen the rights of (some) people in precarious work. The proposals under consultation have been described by Trades Union Congress (TUC) General Secretary Frances O’Grady as “a baby step”. They were in response to the disappointing Taylor Review into Modern Employment Practices (see the August 2017 Freelance) and a subsequent report by two Parliamentary Committees (December 2017). Proposals include improvements to the enforcement of holiday pay and statutory sick pay entitlements, more enforcement of rules on “umbrella companies” and some limited improvements to awards at Employment Tribunal.

Also planned is a right for all workers from “day one” (the day they start work) to be given detailed written statements about pay, conditions and deductions. There are also proposals on removing the legal loophole that allows employers to pay agency workers far less than permanent staff doing the exact same job. Ministers are also consulting on the enforcement of employment rights and on the complex tests of whether someone is engaged as genuinely self-employed.

For details and how to give your views see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1804gig.html

TUC Women’s Conference 2018

REVELATIONS of pandemic sexual harassment and yawning gender pay gaps this year brought an especially solemn significance to the TUC Women’s conference. While celebrating 100 years since some women gained the vote, and 150 years of the TUC, the annual conference was a compelling reminder that equal treatment at work, at home, and within unions demands continuous campaigning.

“These are hard times, but they are exciting times,” said Frances O’Grady, TUC general secretary: “We have to stand up for issues that matter most for women workers.”

The NUJ delegation proposed motions on the gender pay gap and on equal maternity pay for self-employed people at the conference, held at the TUC’s headquarters, Congress House in London, on 7-9 March. BBC worker Cath Saunt called for current rules requiring companies with 250 or more employees to publish their gender pay gaps to be extended to those with 50 or more employees. “It’s a hundred years since women first got the right to vote and yet we are still fighting for pay parity,” she said.

“The BBC’s record, bravely high-lighted by former China bureau chief, Carrie Gracie, is a gender pay gap of 9.3 per cent.” Dawn Butler, shadow secretary of state for women and equalities, added her support at the conference, committing to “holding the government to account” on addressing the gender pay gap.

Meanwhile, London Freelance Branch co-equalities officer Magda Ibrahim called for a lobby to address discrepancies in maternity pay between self-employed and employed women. The difference in statutory maternity pay for employed workers, and maternity allowance – which is a set rate for the self-employed – can mean at least a third less money when calculated based on minimum wage rates.

“Maternity pay has long been a bone of contention in the UK – let’s take this opportunity to lobby to close the gap in maternity pay for employed and self-employed workers and support women in whatever type of work they are doing,” she urged.

Fellow delegate and NUJ Disabled Members’ Council chair Ann Galpin called for solidarity with hunger strikers at Yarl’s Wood Immigration Removal Centre in Bedford.

The conference was a chance for more than 260 delegates from 35 unions – as well as representatives from trades councils – to debate issues including flexible working, Brexit, the menopause at work, discrimination against older workers, and how to organise women in the gig economy within the union movement. Of the 44 motions discussed during the event, one was selected by ballot to be presented to TUC Congress, which takes place in Manchester on 9-12 September. The chosen topic is sexual harassment, with a motion observing that “staff on precarious contracts can be particularly vulnerable because of dependence upon white male structures for promotion or work”. Mary Bousted, TUC vice president, added: “More than 50 per cent of women have experienced some form of sexual harassment at work... the trade union movement is not immune from it. We must not be ashamed to say ‘it has happened to me’.”

© Magda Ibrahim

La Stampa and the Trust Project

THE TRUST Project has developed tools to identify and certify reliable contents for online newspapers with a sort of digital label, a bit like those for tracing food products, recognisable by search engine algorithms which in this way can enhance them.

I have worked with conviction to identify its indicators and to publish the Code of Ethics for La Stampa to which all the employees and collaborators are required to conform. I have also participated in the development of the ethical rules of journalists. Their implementation is a different matter.

Thanks to a platform developed for this purpose, the biographies of journalists who want to join the project are online so that the articles published with the Trust Project logo have clickable authors, in order to know who they are and see their profile, their face, the summary of their CV, their social accounts or their email address to be able to contact them.

But editorial work must also be transparent: who is the journalist who edited the article, what are the documents and the sources of reference? And the corrections must also be transparent, and include their date and time.

The usability of this model needs to be publicised more, in order to help readers to report errors.

We believe that increasing transparency and dialogue with the public makes us more credible and help us win readers’ trust.

All this takes time because a deep cultural change is needed in newsrooms, where – in a time of crisis of newspapers – there is still the need to be clear to win back the trust of the public by every single person and the whole company.

© Anna Masera.

Public Editor, La Stampa; translation © Francesca Marchese