

Employment Concerns

It is customary around the Christmas period to see an increase in the number of people who become employed. Unfortunately, this in most instances is only short-term employment. The fact that the Christmas season runs for a period of basically two months, is not a significant financial concern for employers. As a matter of fact, it is a short-term solution aimed at responding to the high traffic demands of customers who are engaging in Christmas shopping. This is a time when employers have an interest in engaging additional manpower, conscious of the fact that the out turn of this investment is a grand pay day.

In a time of economic hardship, it is expected that this seasonal employment will attract many of those who are unemployed. These persons are not in a strong bargaining position and would find it difficult to make any demand for an attractive wage. Most of those who are fortunate to be temporary employed, accept the offer in the hope that the length of their employment will extend beyond the Christmas period.

This seasonal employment is not to be frowned upon, given that it helps to bring some level of income however small, to those who are desperately in need. Employers in the wholesale, retail and distribution business are beneficiary of the labour of those to whom they pay a small wage in expectation of high productivity. It is customary for most businesses to have long opening hours at Christmas time, where persons are required to work beyond the mandatory forty hours in a work week. There is a need to safeguard the interest temporary employees, who may be expected to work these long hours without receiving any overtime pay. This is part of the labour exploitation which takes place.

There was a time when Christmas and summer vacation jobs were reserved primarily for students from secondary schools and tertiary institutions. Now in times of crisis, many of those who find themselves laid off, retrenched and unemployed, are eager to compete for any available job opportunity. It might appear that there is some exaggeration of this, but in a tight job market where there are limited job opportunities, there is fierce competition to secure employment.

While most of unemployed person are concerned with finding a job, the remuneration being offered is sometimes a turn off for many. Employers in an effort to cash in on cheap labour at a time when there plenty competing for the few job opportunities, resort to offer wages that start at the level of the national minimum wage. There seems to be no regard for the demands and value of the job. It would appear that a sense of narrow mindedness and selfishness prevail amongst employers, as they undertake to capitalize on the favourable labour market conditions and the vulnerability of workers.

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Stories have been told of employers not taking into consideration the experience that recruited workers bring to the job. There is another side of this, which relates to the recruitment and hiring of young workers. Some employers are requiring that these new hire have some form of work or job experience. It is difficult to understand how most young workers who have come straight out of secondary school, college or university could be expected to have work experience, having never been employed.

The quality of the jobs which are being offered to young workers is something to be concerned about. Based on the level of academic qualifications and skilled training acquired by many young graduates, it is reasonable to assume that the jobs on offer would match their academic qualification, skill level, competencies and expertise. Very often this is far from the case. This therefore does not serve to motivate young workers, and could be a factor in their turn off in seeking to find gainful employment.

Added to the list of employment woes, is the timely receipt of pay at the end of the period of engagement. There have been cries heard from employees of having to go away without receiving their pay, and being asked to return a week or more thereafter to collect. Reports have also surfaced that some employees engaged in the offering verbal contracts of employment. Worse yet, some employers are accused of not paying their portion of the employee's National Insurance benefit.

While it may be politically expedient to make promises of bringing hundreds of new jobs on the market, the fore runner to this must be ensuring that the employment practices do not leave much to be desired.

It ought to be recognized that the creation of low paying jobs, the demand by employers to hire persons with work experience and acts of discriminating in the employment process between young and the old, will cause the best intentions to be an exercise in futility.