

Onondaga Citizens League

Study Session #12 January 31, 2017

“How CNY Works: Examining the Diversity of Our Economic Base – Past, Present and Future”

Meeting topic: “The Economic and Social Impact of Third Party Employment Services”

12-1:30 p.m., Oswego Metro Center

Presenters:

David Van Arsdale, Associate Professor of Sociology, Onondaga Community College, author of *The Poverty of Work: Selling Servant, Slave and Temporary Labor on the Free Market*.

Dave DeSario, Founding member of the Alliance for the American Temporary Workforce and Executive Producer of the documentary, *A Day's Work*, which examines how the temporary staffing industry puts American workers at risk.

Jeanette Zoekler, MPH Project Manager, The Law Wage Workers' Health Project

David Van Arsdale spoke about how he became interested in the field of agencies offering temporary work services. After studying at the Maxwell School, Van Arsdale worked at Unity Acres in Oswego County, a facility that serves men who are at risk of being homeless, generally because of addiction. Van Arsdale said he met many young men at Unity Acres who had worked in temporary jobs and had struggled to be able to make a living. He chose to research the history and impact of temporary labor for his dissertation.

He traced the history of temporary work back to the 1600s in Europe, showing that the need for “quick, accessible labor,” without concern for the worker, provided the model for slavery. The historical term used for third-party employment agencies is “intelligence offices.”

Van Arsdale said the field of temporary help is a \$100 billion a year industry in the United States.

Dave DeSario began his presentation with showing an advertisement for “Kelly Girl” services from 1971.

<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/717839-kelly-services-never-never-girl-ad-from-1971.html>

While today's advertisements for temporary help agencies are not as blatant, DeSario said the same justifications are still used. Relying on temporary help alleviates a great deal of responsibility for an employer. "This is about replacing your workforce with disposable workers," DeSario said.

He said the greatest abuses are with low wage work. While some temporary employees do move into fulltime work for a company, he said most do not. "The longer an employee works for a temporary agency, the more money the temporary agency makes," DeSario said.

DeSario showed the documentary, which tells the story of Day Davis, a temporary worker who was killed on his first day on a job at the Bacardi Rum factory. He had received minimal safety training. The film explores the financial and legal ramifications of temporary help. If an employee is injured or killed on a job – who is at fault, the temp agency or the company?

Agencies generally handle workmen's compensation insurance, and that means that the companies do not have to be as concerned with safety regulations.

DeSario said some temporary agencies focus on hiring particular ethnic groups. Sometimes, people in an extended family work for the same temporary agency. This can make employees reticent about raising safety concerns. A person may be afraid to complain, because he/she is afraid of losing a job, and afraid family members may also lose their jobs.

DeSario said three states, California, Illinois and Massachusetts have "right to know" laws, stating that temporary employees are entitled to basic information, such as where they will be working, designated pay days, and whom they should contact if they are injured. Below is the Massachusetts law, which was enacted in 2013.

<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXXI/Chapter149/Section159C>

Jeanette Zoeckler, of The Low Wage Workers' Health Project, said that up to 10 percent of the low wage workers in Syracuse are employed by temporary work agencies. She said there are instances where a home health aide, employed by a temporary work agency, is dispatched to a client's home to provide services. If the client (generally an elderly person) does not want services, the worker leaves and receives no pay for their time or transportation.

Zoeckler said that in our area nail salons are a concern. They are not well regulated and immigrants can be exploited. The products that nail technicians use could be a health concern, as well.

DeSario emphasized that temporary workers are less likely to report their injuries, than regular employees. He said that a temporary worker has a 50 percent higher chance of being injured than a regular, fulltime employee.