

# Introduction to ““Slave-Like Conditions”: Abuse of Foreign Workers in Canada”

Victor G. Devinatz<sup>1</sup>

Published online: 14 June 2015  
© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2015

A defining characteristic of precarious employment is its temporary nature which includes seasonal workers, day laborers, temporary workers, freelancers, independent contractors, self-employed workers and interns. In order to describe the growing number of people who engage in such unstable employment which often pays insufficient wages and exposes workers to extremely harsh working conditions, the French scholar Pierre Bourdieu in 1998 coined the term, the precariat, a combination of “precarious” and “proletariat.” More recently, the precariat has been popularized by Dr. Guy Standing, a Professor of Development Studies at the University of London, in two books, *The Precariat: The Dangerous New Class* (2011) and *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (2014).

According to Standing, the precariat emerged in the 1980s with the occurrence of economic liberalization in many of the rich, industrialized nations. During this decade, these advanced economies became open to competition from other market economies that were undergoing significant development. This led to an additional 1.5 billion workers from low-income countries becoming part of the global work force who were willing to work for a small portion of the wages commanded by U.S. and European workers at the time.

In this well-written and timely article, Dr. Jeffrey Shantz, who teaches criminology at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Vancouver, Canada, examines one segment of the Canadian precariat, specifically migrant foreign workers. The author focuses much of his discussion on the mistreatment of two groups of workers: those who were employed at the Khaira tree planting camp in British Columbia as well as those who worked for McDonald’s in Edmonton. Although Shantz acknowledges that migrant foreign workers can obtain a degree of justice from human rights tribunals and “mass media investigations,” Shantz concludes that a better solution for remediating these workers’ problems would be unionization. To date, however, as Shantz points out, the Canadian unions and union federations have shown little interest in organizing such workers.

---

✉ Victor G. Devinatz  
vgdevin@ilstu.edu

<sup>1</sup> Department of Management & Quantitative Methods, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-5580, USA

If any of the journal's readers are interested in responding to any essays published in the "Perspectives" Section or would like to write articles on any topics in the field of employee relations, please do not hesitate to contact me with your proposal. I welcome both practitioner-based and scholarly-based articles written from any one of a variety of theoretical perspectives. I hope that you enjoy this article and find it most illuminating.