TRACK 2: Adjusting to precarious work: An ordeal of trade unions in the Zimbabwean mining industry.

The nature of paid work has undergone change, and precarious forms of employment have dominated in nations, labour markets and industries. In the same vein, the Zimbabwean mining sector has not been spared. In recent years, permanent employment has undoubtedly been replaced by non-standard forms of employment. Subsequently, this shift in the world of work characterized by the growth of precarious work has posed challenges to trade unions. The undisputed increase of the vulnerability of workers under atypical forms of employment such as temporary, fixed term contracts, self-employment, labour broking and seasonal work in the mining sector has prompted this research. This paper examines how precarious work has challenged the survival of trade unions. It also seeks to understand the role being played by trade unions in representing precarious workers. Being qualitative in nature, data collected through telephone interviews, virtual workshop observation, the analysis of various secondary documents and collective bargaining agreements was used in this paper. Sixty five participants which comprised of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade union members, key trade unionists from sectoral level and some mine workers were used. Having been analysed through a thematic lens, key findings indicated the massive growth of precarious work in the form of self-employment, seasonal work, part time work and short term contracts in the mining sector. A loose labour market decreased union power, which ultimately points to increased employer power and the effects of the recently COVID-19 pandemic have been cited as some of the causes of precariousness. Trade unions however, have not been taking an active role in representing precarious workers mainly due to rigidity and lack of resources. The main recommendation is that trade unions instead of confining themselves to traditional issues of wage negotiation, should be flexible enough to represent "the outsiders," and should engage in social movement trade unionism.

Introduction

Over the past decades, there has been an extensive growth of precarious work in Zimbabwe and the mining sector has witnessed this development at a wider scale. Regardless of its growth and presence for some time in the world of work, precarious work continues to be an enigma for industrial relations actors. Generally speaking, on one side it has been eroticized for the freedom and flexibility that it comes with, and on the other hand, it has been defamed for undermining

employment conditions, fair labour standards, collectivism and employee rights. Whilst a number of employers and employer organisations celebrate and romanticize this development by linking it to the new work and to the new economy (Burgess, Connell and Rasmussen, 2005), trade unions view it negatively for replacing standard forms work and shaking trade union membership.

There are notable differences in the level, extent of precariousness and job quality between nations and even different sectors in the same country (Kuene and Pedaci, 2019). From the national dimension, a number of explanatory reasons can be advanced such as the national structural and institutional characteristics, including levels of prosperity, types of capitalism and labour market (de)regulation (Prosser, 2016). Factors such as but not conclusive to different levels of international competition, technological advancement and size of the organisation can to some extent be used to explain the within-country sectorial differences. Given these differences, this paper discusses challenges faced by trade unions in Zimbabwe in adjusting to precarious work. This paper is restricted to discussion of:

The forms and causes of precarious work in the Zimbabwean mining sector,

How precarious work has challenged trade unions' survival in this sector and

The role trade unions are playing in representing precarious workers.

Forms and causes of precarious work

Precarious work has been a hot topic under discussion with researchers citing that the world of work and employment relations are gradually being characterized and molded by precarious and insecure employment (Buschoff, 2015; Standing, 2011). The concept of precarious work is branched, as there are different types and levels of precariousness (Kuene, 2015). Contrary to the predominant thinking that precarious work is manifested in nonstandard forms of employment, Grimshaw, Johnson, Rubery and Keizer (2016) suggest that both standard forms of employment and non-standard jobs can be precarious. As such, a number of definitions have been put forward in trying to explain precarious work. The concept is usually associated with a combination of features, such as non-standard employment contracts, pay insecurity and weak employment and social rights (Medonca, 2020). However, it is undeniable to note that work precarity appears concerted in certain non-standard jobs. In Zimbabwe, the escalation of precarious work is greatly related to the progression of non-standard jobs. In the country's mining sector to be particular,

this would be in the form of temporary work, fixed term contracts, self-employment, labour broking and seasonal work. Atypical employment and job insecurity, however, do not certainly imply precariousness; as well not all standard forms of employment involve security or absence of precariousness. To exemplify, highly skilled or unionised employees under non- standard forms of employment or employment agencies may enjoy security whilst those under standard or full time employment may experience insecurity depending on national or industry-specific employment regulations and social security (Mendonca, 2020). In light of the above, it can be noted that precarious work can take a number of forms and characteristics with different levels of insecurities: objective and subjective insecurity (stemming from national level and individual level respectively) (ILO, 2012: 27). Thus, in this regard, not only does precarious work involve objective employment structures, but also individual involvements and experiences that include but not limited to fear of job loss, future employment insecurity, reduced to no control over how one's work is performed and remunerated (Heyes, Moore, Newsome and Tomlinson, 2018).

Temporary work

Temporary work is one example of precarious work that is rampant in the mining sector. ILO (2016) defines temporary employment, as a form of employment whereby employees have a specified period of engagement. A variety of contracts falls under temporary employment and these embrace a contract of fixed duration, task-based contracts, and seasonal or casual work. In line with the ILO definition, the Zimbabwean Labour Act Chapter 28:01 on S12 (3), stipulates that any contract of employment that is not specific pertaining to its duration or date of termination is deemed an indefinite contract. In this regard therefore, whether documented or verbal, there appears to be unanimity on the fact that a fixed term contract is set on a predefined term. Though a fixed term contract can be terminated upon lapse of the contract, S12B (3b) of the Labour Act states that it can be reckoned unfair dismissal if the worker had a legitimate expectation of renewing the contract, provided someone else was employed instead of the former job holder.

Casual work

Casual work, another form of temporary employment is very prominent in Zimbabwe. This is the employment of individuals on sporadic and irregular basis for a specified duration. Continuous engagement of a worker for a period that exceeds six weeks in any four consecutive months,

automatically means that worker turns into being an employee on an infinite contract (Labour Act, S12(3)). In Zimbabwe, casual work accounts for over 35% of all wage employment (ILO, 2016).

Part time work

Legally speaking, part time work can be understood as any paid work that has a short duration than full time work (ILO, 1994). The challenge with this definition however, is national regulations differ in their definition of full time working week. Resultantly, a threshold of working hours for part time workers has been set at 30-35hours a week. The prevalence of part time work has considerably risen worldwide since early 2000. An estimate of about one in every five employees is working as a part timer in Europe and it is more frequent in Switzerland where 33% of the nation's workforce is in the form of part-timers who are significantly represented by women (ILO, 2016).

Generally speaking, in a number of countries, the society, companies and governments for a number of reasons have cheered part time work. Among the many reasons is that, it ensures the inclusion of the secluded groups or individuals with other family responsibilities such as women, older people and students in the labour market. Some organisations use part time employment as a retention strategy to hold aged, knowledgeable employees facing retirement as well as for attraction and retention of workers for a specified schedule. In as much as the reasons for part time arrangements vary from country to country and are organization specific, this arrangement is on the peak in Zimbabwe because of the loose labour market hence the part-timers cannot secure a full-time job. Thus whilst in other countries especially developed ones, part time work is voluntary, in Zimbabwe, due to high levels of unemployment and the downtrodden economy, part time arrangements are mostly involuntary to both the employer and employee. In Africa, part time employment is endemic and in Zimbabwe, its prevalence of 50 per cent dwarfs part-time work elsewhere in the world (ILO, 2016). In 2014, part time arrangements in Zimbabwe were as high as 50%, with time related underemployment being rampant and over 50% of the part timers being women.

Causes of precarious work

Over the past years, the prevalence of people employed under atypical forms of employment has significantly increased. The growth of precarious work can be explained through a wide range of

factors. Changing global employment trends, marked by increased calls for a 'flexible workforce' have led to an increase in the number of temporary workers, including those on part-time contracts, pseudo self-employment, subcontractors, and casual workers (Benassi, & Tekeste, 2018). Some scholars point out supply-side factors such as the changing demographic composition of the workforce, which includes more women, young people and migrant workers (Kalleberg, 2012). The increase of women participation in the labour market has been found partly responsible for the increase of nonstandard work because they require a flexible work schedule (Gustafsson, Kejoh, and Wetzels, 2003). Low unionisation rates among young workers is also argued to contribute to the diffusion of precarious employment (Heery and Abbott, 2000).

However, demand-side factors plays the most important role. Technological change caused a decline of middle-range occupations, creating a polarized labour market between high-skill "good" jobs and low-skill precarious jobs (Kalleberg, 2012). The occupational shifts taking place across sectors, as the economy is shifting to the service sector, has required companies to compress labour costs in the growing service industry (Benassi, & Tekeste, 2018). Recent research pointed at the impact of "financialization" on employees' outcomes, as the increasing dependence of companies on financial markets is forcing them to focus on the short-term interests of their shareholders, which makes them more vulnerable to financial market volatility (Campbell, 2021). This process has a negative impact on the job security of the incumbent workforce, as more companies are forced to downsize their workforce (Goyer, Clark, and Bhankaraully,2016). In order to compress labour costs and to react more flexibly to short-term downturns, companies have increasingly utilised non- standard, short term employment arrangements, which can be highly precarious. This strategy allows companies to reduce headcount while benefitting of a cheap workforce often not covered by collective agreements and unions.

The growth of precarious work can also be attributed to the loose labour market especially in the Zimbabwean context. The changes in the world of work which has resulted in a massive shift from traditional to atypical forms of employment has also brought with it high levels of unemployment. In 2018, the ILO estimations on worldwide unemployment was 192 million people, (ILO, 2018b). However, it has been argued that the correct figures of unemployment are significantly greater as official unemployment statistics undervalue the magnitude of unemployment in nations that lack apt unemployment cover. In a number of countries, the unemployment rate has remained static or

reduced and has not gone back to its level before 2008 (ILO, 2018b). According to Bernaciak, Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman (2014), high unemployment rates have been recorded partly due to the global competition, which has steered organisations to relocate abroad. In Zimbabwe, the poor economic situation that has seen a number of companies closing down, downsizing, outsourcing and offshoring leaving masses of people unemployed *have contributed to high levels of unemployment.* As companies are increasingly becoming more profit-oriented vis-a-vis operating at minimal costs, organisations have resorted to non-standard forms of employment, as they are cost effective at least in the short run (Gall & Hurd 2011).

How precarious work has challenged trade unions' survival

Researchers have stressed that the challenges that trade unions are facing are brought about by employers and labour markets that foster precarious work (Hassel, 2014). Precarious work in Zimbabwe has been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic making it even more difficult for trade unions to respond and cope. The mining sector's response to the pandemic, has increased the numbers of precarious workers, intensified precariousness for already precarious workers and introduced new types and levels of insecurity for many workers in the sector. Though the long term consequences to trade unions will become purer with time, the current outlook is dark and gloomy. As the sector is embarking on its road to recovery, companies strategising on being more proactive to disasters, risk management and pandemics, employer organisations are proposing changes to further 'workplace flexibility', restrain union action, and enhance management discretion. Some of the employment reforms have been brought about by the emergence of virtual labour markets where certain traditional aspects of the employment relationship, which seemed vital such as issues of remuneration, working hours and terms and conditions, rights and obligations are less clearly understood and tied to the employer-employee status. Thus, the absence of a clearly defined employment relationship has posed a huge threat for trade unions' survival and growth (Visser, 2019). This is because typical employment has for years formed the foundation for the enactment of laws and regulations that safeguard employees' right of association and collective bargaining hence a shift towards unstandardised forms of employment leaves the relevance of trade unions in question (Stone and Arthurs, 2013).

Associational power has been vetoed as a vital factor for unions to control and limit atypical employment effectively (Doellgast, Sarmiento-Mirwaldt, and Benassi, 2018). Associational power

is defined by Wright (2000: 962) as a union's ability of recruiting and representing employees. Through associational power, a union has a variety of resources that it can come up with and put in place to put worker solidarity (Doellgast et al., 2018: 19). In this regard, associational power therefore is not only limited to union density, but stretches also to a union's capability to relate and develop relationships with a diverse workforce regardless of whether they belong to the same workplace or not. In contrast, however, the existence of a group of precarious workforce at workplace is however, a major obstacle to inclusive forms of worker solidarity. According to Drahokoupil and Myant (2015), this challenge can be better explained by the uncertainty and insecurity that stems from precarious work that diminishes employees' willingness to join trade unions and bargain for better working conditions.

Additionally, the disjointed workforce at the contemporary workplaces characterised by the core, full time workforce and peripheral precarious employees is also being used by employers as an effective divide and rule tactic weakening labour solidarity hence making it difficult for trade unions to garner membership, (Hammer and Riisgaard, 2015). In the same vein, Hyman (1997: 521) states that the distinction and demarcation of employees in to groups of full-time and precarious workers has a detrimental effect of ending up eroding 'egalitarian commitments' as it either consciously or subconsciously endorses the dispersion of workers' interests. Resultantly, a certain group of workers especially those that feel excluded may decide to shun trade unions if there is a perceived element of favouritism on the other group's interests than theirs.

In the same vein, the Orthodox economists argue that if there is any challenges that trade unions are facing, it is themselves. The argument here is that trade unions are to blame as they are co-responsible for the immense growth of precarious work, as they do not represent the interests of these so-called "outsiders" in the form of precarious workers. Indeed, the interests of well protected insiders with good-quality jobs and precarious outsiders are often argued to differ, and trade unions, with generally limited membership if any among precarious workers, are argued to further the interests of the insiders while ignoring or opposing the interests of outsiders (Lindbeck and Snower, 2002; Rueda, 2007).

Precarious work is highly related to increased occurrences of changes in jobs and even occupations. This frequency in job changes has not only affected precarious workers who for

different reasons may opt to change jobs, but has also greatly affected trade union membership making its survival uncertain. This shows how problematic it has become for trade unions to depend on the traditional industrial or occupational basis for organisation and identity. At the same time, it has become increasingly challenging for unions to recruit and represent employees engaged under non-standard forms of employment. By virtue of them being on short term employment, their membership is also in most times often short lived as they often shift jobs, sectors and in worst cases even nations. According to ILO (2016), casual employment is a prominent feature in low and middle-income countries and in Zimbabwe, one in three employees have a casual job. This gives a glimpse of how these workers have been reluctant and not so keen to join trade unions, as they do not have any form of job security or legitimate expectation.

Though precarious employees in the form of temporary, casual and especially outsourced workers share the same workplace with those engaged as full-time employees, they are sometimes officially under a different and separate employer such as a labour broker or a contractor (Campbell, 2021). Depending with the form of precarity, these employees may have similar tasks, responsibilities and duties as their permanent counterparts or if they are peripheral and are not working side by side with full time employees, they may have separate tasks. Thus, the distinct employment status for these employees generates both practical and legal difficulties for trade unions. The difference in contractual status may also point to diverging and even conflicting interests of these employees hence it becomes difficult for the same union to represent both groups (Campbell, 2021). Because of these and other reasons, trade unions face challenges to recruit, organise and represent precarious employees.

More so, precarious work is highly characterised by individualism instead of collectivism, a phenomenon that has affected trade unions as now employees negotiate on an individual basis with employers instead of being represented by a trade union. As a result, these precarious forms of employment give workers little reason if any to join trade unions (Visser, Hayter and Gammarino, 2015). In a bid to secure recurring employment, these individuals display their loyalty to the employer by not joining trade unions. Another explanation is that the labor laws in most developing countries do not fully consider those under precarious work hence the workers are not protected by the laws and trade unions alike. Thus in light of this view, Luce (2014), observes that precarious work enables employers to evade regulating labour laws mainly because contractors are excluded

in wage regulation and in the right to associate hence companies more than ever are celebrating and advancing precarious work arrangement as it is beneficial to them.

Unions' response to precarious work

In Zimbabwe's mining sector, the record regarding regulation of precarious work has been particularly disappointing, as unions have not been taking an active role in responding to precarious work. As it is argued, union strategies and their outcomes are strongly affected by their power resources (Korpi, 1983), which include the level of membership, centralization of union movements, cooperation between unions and the institutional positions unions occupy in collective bargaining and social dialogue (Frege and Kelly, 2003; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2013; Keune, 2018). The more power resources, the more successful unions will be in fighting precarious employment. Most precarious workers in Zimbabwe are categorised as casual and suffer the multiple disadvantages of that status. Instead of coming up with strategies to circumvent challenges being faced by these workers, trade unions in Zimbabwe have had a glaring failure in representing these precarious workers. It is difficult to identify any significant union initiatives currently as unions are facing several barriers (Kaseke, Chaminuka & Musingafi, 2015). The barriers include but are not limited to unfavourable contextual changes, dwindled union strength and influence, intensified divisions amongst unions, and lack of financial resources, (Campbell, 2021).

In other countries, national governments, supported by trade unions, have tried to partly (re)regulate the use of nonstandard work contracts. In Bulgaria, legislation limited the use of successive fixed-term contracts while introducing more options for working time flexibility with organisations (Broughton, Biletta, and Kullander,2010). In China, the Labour Contract Law in 2008 regulated the activities of labor dispatching agencies, limiting them to specific sectors, clarifying their responsibilities towards the employees and preventing them from subcontracting the same worker more than once (Lan, Pickles, and Zhu, 2014).

Trade unions have also tried to regulate the use of nonstandard work and to prevent the diffusion of low-paid contracts by following two main strategies. On the one hand, unions have tried to bargain quotas and other limitations to the use of nonstandard work at company and at sectoral level. For instance, in German automotive companies workers' representatives bodies were found

to bargain workplace agreements setting quotas for agency workers and temporary workers, and specifying the circumstances under which they can be employed e.g. production peaks, replacement of workers on sick leave (Benassi, 2013).

On the other hand, trade unions have initiated campaigns to recruit precarious workers and to bargain on their behalf better wages and working conditions. In Japan, for instance, the national trade union confederation Rengo provided guidelines to industrial confederations, enterprise unions for organising part-time, and agency workers, which were implemented to different extents and with mixed results (Watanabe, 2015). Furthermore, precarious workers have sometimes set up their own unions. For instance, the Brazilian Ibitinga Needle Workers Union, which represents home-based garment workers, achieved a collective agreement in 2001 forcing employers to provide those workers with a labor card, granting them access to benefits. Similarly, the Indian Self-Employed Women's Association bargained for minimum wages on piece-rate basis for its members and has been fighting for access to social benefits (Tilly, Agarwala, Mosoetsa, Ngai, Salas, and Sheikh, 2013).

Nature of the mining industry in Zimbabwe

The mining sector in Zimbabwe is highly diversified, with close to 40 different minerals that include gold, platinum, chrome, coal, and diamonds. The sector accounts for about 12 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and it is claimed that the sector has the potential to generate US$12 billion annually by 2023 if the challenges that the sector is facing such as persistent power shortages, foreign currency shortages, and policy uncertainties are addressed (Manhando, 2018). The sector is differentiated in terms of minerals produced, the number of operating mines and dispersal of control over the mine production. There are more than 800 operating mines (large and small) around the country. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Zimbabwe was poised to become a significant force in African mining, employing 59, 000 workers in 1995. This was due to diverse mineral resources, infrastructure, skilled labour and a relatively stable fiscal and monetary regime. The late 1990s witnessed declining production and loss of investor confidence against a background of emerging macroeconomic instability (Dansereau, 2000). In 2000 the mineral production index dropped to 104 from 116 in 1995, by 2003 the index had fallen to 79 (Kaseke et al 2015). After dollarisation, the fortunes of the mining sector have been improving and the country has been able to take advantage of the commodities price boom.

However, commodity prices have weakened since 2013. This has also seen the sector employment levels declining from 45,000 in 2012 to 39,200 by 2014 (Kaseke et al, 2015). Currently, the sector is said to earn approximately 60% of the country's foreign currency, attracts more than 50% of the FDI into the economy and employs over 45,000 people in large scale, and more than 500,000 in small scale and artisanal mining (LEDRIZ, 2016). In terms of current performance, the mining sector grew by 8.5% in 2017, underpinned by strong performance in gold (14%), diamond (44%), chrome (48.7%) and coal (16%) (Zimbabwe country commercial guide, 2020). Concerning employment relations, the picture is mixed as the sector; utilize both standard and non- standard forms of employment. The attitudes of companies to unions operating in the industry vary from cooperative to hostile. A survey that was conducted by ZIMTRADE (2016) in the mining sector in Zimbabwe revealed that trade union density in the industry was at its peak in 2004 at 38.6 percent. Conversely, from the period 2004 to 2018, the density declined by 18.9 percent, amounting to 16.6 percent in 2018. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade union (ZCTU)[(2019) report indicated that trade union density in the industry likewise dropped by 0.2 percent in 2018.

Study Methodology

The methodology used for this paper included secondary literature review and interviews with key informant. Secondary literature review of previous studies done on mining and the extractive industry in Zimbabwe was carried out. Telephone interviews were held with (ZCTU) members, key trade unionists from sectoral level, employer representatives and some mineworkers all from the Midlands Province. Virtual workshop observations were also used in this research. Sixty-five participants were used in this research. Of these 65 participants, 15 were Zimbabwe Congress of Trade union members, the other 25 were key trade unionists from sectoral level, 10 consisted of the employer representatives and the remaining 15 were general mine workers from different organisations in the mining sector.

Various secondary documents were analysed in this research. Secondary data involves using data gathered by other researchers usually for a different purpose (Nachmias & Nachmias, 2005). The same is highlighted by Punch (2005), who suggest that secondary data involves the reanalysis of previously collected and analysed data whilst Bryman (2004), referred to secondary data analysis as the analysis of data by researchers who were not involved when the data was collected. The

researcher thus relied on information in the public domain; mining reports, ILO documents and collective bargaining agreements from the mining industry were also used.

Table 1. Response rate

Category	**Population**	**Targeted sample**	**Actual sample**	**%**
ZCTU members	20	20	15	75%
Sectoral union officials	50	40	25	62,5%
General mine employees	30	20	15	75%
Employer Representatives	25	20	10	50%
Total	**125**	**100**	**65**	**65%**

Source: own preparation

As shown in Table 1, the research initially targeted 125 participants but managed to gather data from 100 participants representing 66%. Given that the researchers adopted a qualitative study, the sample becomes sufficient enough to generalize the findings. Telephone interviews, were used and data was analysed using thematic approach. Thematic analysis is, at its core, a method for identifying and describing patterns in qualitative data (Trahan & Steward, 2013) and the main aim was to identify themes, i.e. patterns in the data that are important or interesting. These were then used as themes to address the research or say something about an issue (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Data was tested using framework analysis, which involves familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, coding, and interpretation (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013).

Empirical Findings and Discussions

Empirical Findings on an ordeal of trade unions in the Zimbabwean mining industry as they adjust to precarious work. This section will present the findings on what participants thought about the challenges being faced by Zimbabwean mining sector trade unions as they adjust to precarious work. The findings focus on information gathered from interviews, union officials as well as general mining employees and secondary data.

Forms and causes of precarious work

A significant number of the participants were well versed with the forms and causes of precarious work. Fifteen participants were of the view that precarious employment entails short-term contracts, which are characterised by lack of job security as well as low salaries and poor working conditions. Part time employment, casual work as well as seasonal work were identified as some of the types of precarious work. One ZCTU official noted that:

….precarious work entails unstandardized, short term contracts such as fixed term contracts and seasonal work where the employee has no job security, low salaries and limited say over work arrangements. In the mining sector, most of the non expert workers fall under precarious work.

This is buttressed by Burgess and Campbell, (1998) who suggests that precarious' employment is employment that is low quality and encompasses a range of factors that put workers at risk of injury, illness and/or poverty. In support, Rodgers and Rodgers (1989) suggest that there are risks ranging from low wages, low job security, limited control over workplace conditions, little protection from health and safety risks in the workplace and less opportunity for training and career progression for employees under precarious employment. However, the participants seemed to have the view that precarious work is better understood and is manifested only in non- standard forms of employment. One interviewee stated:

...this sector is now highly utilizing precarious workers in the form of temporary workers, those on fixed term contracts and casual labourers. Only a few workers are permanent.

This is contrary to Grimshaw et al., (2016) who suggest that both standard forms of employment and non-standard jobs can be precarious. However, temporary contracts often also provide a lower

wage, and do not always confer the same benefits, which often accrue with time and are directly linked to the length and status of the employment relationship (Ncube, 2017).

On the causes of precarious work, 30 participants unanimously pointed out high unemployment rate. One management representative pointed:

…business world has been presented with a number changes, among these changes are the structural changes characterized by a massive shift from traditional standard forms of employment to atypical forms and these have brought with them unemployment.

Another participant observed:

…widespread unemployment makes job seekers feel lucky and content with any form of employment that they get hence the increase in precarious work.

To indicate the intensity of unemployment, in 2018, the ILO estimated the worldwide unemployment to be 192 million people, (ILO, 2018b). In Zimbabwe, it can be concluded that high unemployment levels are because of the poor economic situation that has led to company closures and or downsizing.

Changed demography was another element that was raised as a causal factor of precarious work by 15 participants. A mine employee noted:

…previously the mining sector was a male dominated industry. Conversely, it is currently witnessing robust growth in women and young employees.

This demographic change has contributed to the rise and growth of precarious work in the mining sector in Zimbabwe. A trade union official noted:

…a number of companies have been taken over by millennials who are not concerned with job security but rather, employment security, contributing to the diffusion of precarious employment.

Similarly, Gustafsson et al. (2003) mention that the increase of women participation in the labour market has been found partly responsible for the increase of nonstandard work because they require a flexible work schedule. Generally, young employees still find it hard to participate fully in trade unionism (Ncube, 2017). Ncube (2020) indicated that this might have a detrimental effect on trade union density, which may affect the union's ability to effectively mobilise within the industry.

Employer representatives and trade union officials noted that technological advancement has contributed to precarious work in the sector. One participant stated:

… unlike a few decades ago, the mining sector is no longer labour extensive as there is now the use of machinery hence that has forced companies to reduce permanent headcount and rely on short term non-standard forms whenever there is need.

This is in line with Kalleberg (2012)'s argument that technological changes caused a decline of middle-range occupations, creating a polarized labour market between high-skill "good" jobs and low-skill precarious jobs. In support, Ncube (2017) reiterates that technology and flexibility are the major forces that are central to the adoption of precarious employment in most Zimbabwean companies.

How precarious work has challenged trade unions' survival

Participants stressed a number of challenges that trade unions are facing due to precarious work. Difficulties to merge opposing employee interests was one of the challenges that eight trade unions officials mentioned. A trade union official noted that

…the company utilizes both standard, full time employees and those under precarious work, who apart from having different interest and employment concerns; they also usually have very opposing interests.

A mine employee also noted:

…it becomes challenging for the same trade union to unite and represent opposing fronts. Resultantly, in an attempt to safeguard the interests of the permanently employed who have been a source of long- standing membership, unions have excluded precarious workers.

The difference in contractual status may also point to diverging and even conflicting interests of these employees hence it becomes difficult for the same union to represent both groups.

In support, Campbell (2021) argue that though precarious employees share the same workplace with those engaged as full-time employees, they are sometimes officially under a different and separate employer such as a labour broker or a contractor.

Lack of unity among employees even those with the same contractual status was raised by 10 participants as another challenge that precarious work has brought. A trade union official stated:

…due to the nature of employment status, precarious work promotes individualistic tendencies. Thus instead of employees coming together and have a united front against an employer, these employees negotiate individually with an employer which previously was the responsibility of a trade union.

This can be explained by the fact that by wanting to secure recurring employment, these individuals display their loyalty to the employer by not joining trade unions. In support, Hyman (1997: 521) states that the distinction and demarcation of employees in to groups of full-time and precarious workers has a detrimental effect of ending up eroding 'egalitarian commitments' as it either consciously or subconsciously indorses the dispersion of workers' interests.

The COVID-19 pandemic was highlighted as another major challenge to trade unions. One participant stated:

…when the pandemic hit, companies closed and a number of employees especially precarious workers could not work from home, some went for months without salaries and others even lost their jobs. That made precarious workers to lose faith even more in trade unions as no successful intervention was done.

In other instances, due to the pandemic even those under full time employment were in constant fear of losing their jobs, salary cuts and not having control over their work, all elements that point to precariousness. As noted by Ncube, (2020), the mining sector's response to the pandemic, has increased the numbers of precarious workers, intensified precariousness for already precarious workers and introduced new types and levels of insecurity for many workers in the sector making it difficult for trade unions to respond and cope.

Trade unions response to precarious work

Increasing precariousness and segmentation in the industry was regarded as a challenge to the union's associational power. Engagement was seen by 10 interviewees as crucial to intervening in the precariousness of the mining industry as well as strengthening the union's associational power. One trade unionists mentioned:

…a number of efforts to organise mineworkers especially small-scale artisanal miners and to get them to participate in union meetings were made but without success.

Another trade unionist explained:

…although there has not been success in representing self-employed miners especially those in artisanal mining, an initiative to include the workers sensitizing them on the importance of joining a trade union was made.

A union participant stated:

… with private social media groups, flyers and face to-face meetings we have tried to engage precarious workers to be unionized.

One mine employee stated:

…the unfavourable local labour market, with relatively high unemployment and low-paid jobs, coupled with a high level of precariousness, initially constrained precarious workers' engagement with the union for fear of dismissal or being disciplined by the company.

One can conclude that considerable resources that the unions do not currently have are required to unionise the segment of precarious mine workers. As a result, the Zimbabwean mining industry unions have not yet taken an active role in representing precarious workers. In that regard, Ncube (2020) argues that for trade unions to thrive there is need for them to learn to co-evolve with the changes happening around the industries. Thus, the speed of change in the industry should be matched proportionately with the speed of change by unions in terms of strategies to survive (Debono, 2015). This is because members do not just join unions; they join unions due to perceived benefits (Moem, 2017). Thus as stated by Ncube (2020), when a union becomes a zombie structure with no meaningful benefits members find it extremely hard to join and fully participate in union business.

Seven ZCTU participants noted that the though in its initial stages, the confederation has plans to represent workers by creating non-standard dedicated federations inside the confederations. One official noted:

… the aim of the federation would be to promote the rights of atypical workers and fully represent them without any hindrances.

This view is supported by Brussels (2014) who argues that trade unions should attribute "dignity" to atypical workers while settings up structures able to overcome the growing labour market segmentation based on the persistence of different social provisions between atypical and typical workers.

Conclusions

This article has presented the challenges that unions in the mining sector in Zimbabwe are facing relating to precarious work and has discussed three key issues associated with precarious work. Discussion has shown that:

Precarious employment is flourishing in the Zimbabwean mining sector and is usually manifested in non-standard jobs. Key findings indicated the massive growth of precarious work in the form of self-employment, seasonal work, part time work and short-term contracts in the mining sector. A loose labour market decreased union power, which ultimately points to increased employer power and the effects of the recently COVID-19 pandemic have been cited as some of the causes of precariousness. In line with the expectations of orthodox economists, unions in the Zimbabwean mining sector do not consider precarious workers as part of their constituency and have exerted little to none tangible effort to defend their interests or represent them. Unlike trade unions in other nations that have an inclusive approach towards precarious workers, aiming to stop the downwards pressure on wages and working conditions, to close the gap between their standards and those of regular workers and to limit the incidence of low-quality employment, in Zimbabwe trade unions in the mining sector focus more on protection of the interests of insiders. The success of union strategies depends largely on their power resources. Conversely, in the Zimbabwean mining sector, unions' power resources are weak to fight precariousness in the sector.

Finally, trade unions in the mining sector have so far not been able to contribute to slowing down the decline of job quality; as there are no documented series of successful union initiatives. Thus, they have not been able to reduce precariousness in the sector or represent precarious workers, as their resources and capacity to shape the labour market remain constrained as evidenced by the increase in precarious work across sectors.

Recommendations

Trade unions' approach should be more inclusive. Unions should aim at bridging the gap with regular workers, often explicitly targeting non-standard workers, both to improve the position of precarious workers and to protect the standards of regular workers. Trade unions instead of confining themselves to traditional issues of wage negotiation, should be flexible enough to represent "the outsiders," and should engage in social movement trade unionism. The paper recommends that the union confederation should push for labour legislation in Zimbabwe to be reviewed with the view to protect precarious worker's interests. This helps them to equally have a voice at the workplace and improve their working conditions as well as have room to want to join unions without fear of losing their jobs.

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