

30/7/2018 - **PRESS STATEMENT** - *Its time for justice for janitors at the courts.*

The media spotlight in the 'gotong royong' activity at the Kuala Lumpur High Court Complex has been on people in high places doing lowly jobs, and misses the plight of the janitors who were not paid by their contractor for weeks past pay day. This is not an isolated case of contract employees in government premises going without pay for days or weeks. Neither is it the only injustice suffered by contract workers in the B40 income band, such as cleaners, security guards and gardeners. The entire contract system adopted by the government for jobs such as the above in its many premises, is unjust, exploitative, and in violation of the rights of workers.

In the first place, the contract jobs in the government sector do not meet the criterion for contract work, in that the jobs are not temporary in nature. All of us are familiar with the notion of contract work, as work that is seasonal or temporary and so, that is mutually understood by worker and boss to be over when the job is completed. Work such as cleaning, gardening and providing security at schools, hospitals and other government departments is permanent in nature and needs to be done for as long as the relevant premises are operational.

It matters a lot when permanent jobs are packaged as contract work and offered to women and men at the bottom of the employment ladder trying desperately to earn a decent wage to feed their families. This is because under the contract system wages remain stagnant, and there is no job security. There is no yearly wage increment, and every three years (if that is the contract term) the worker becomes jobless, and if reemployed, starts again as a fresh employee. A contract cleaner with 20 years of service remains a new worker, at the starting wage, and in addition, is deprived of all the benefits of length of service such as higher EPF and Socso contributions, more days of annual and medical leave, etc.

Further adding to the misery of contract workers in government departments are the contractors, a significant number of whom further squeeze their workers by pocketing part of their workers' wages, paying workers late, deducting but not contributing towards workers EPF and Socso, and dismissing workers at will.

The government is the paymaster for hundreds of thousands of contract jobs in its many departments and premises. These fake fixed term contract jobs were created by the previous government, and while it benefitted its cronies and adherents, did nothing to lift workers from the B40 out of poverty.

This situation needs to change, and as this wrongful practice is also the trend in the private sector, the PH government should take the lead and set an example by ending the contract system for permanent jobs, and directly employing the workers in its premises.

Rani Rasiah, PSM Central Committee member 30/7/2018