

An Open Letter of a Part-Time Instructor from PUP

Jose Mario De Vega

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A Foreword

Simoun Magsalin

Bandilang Itim received this open letter from a former part-time instructor from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP), a state university.

President Rodrigo Duterte ran on the platform to end contractualization yet contractualization remains the norm both in private and public workplaces. Rather than banning contractualization, the state instead institutionalized it in the private sector while doing the bare minimum to curb the practice in the public sector. Two years ago in 2018, there are approximately 2.4 million government workers of which 27 percent of these are contractual workers. De Vega's open letter is one account of the experience of being a contractual worker in a state university.

In the open letter, De Vega details the absurdities in being a contractual worker in a state university. Contractual workers essentially have the same responsibilities and tasks as regular workers but are denied tenure and benefits like GSIS (high interest state pension). Additionally, part-time instructors are expected to perform free labor on university projects in which their superiors earn bonuses while the part-time instructors get nothing in return.

After the open letter, we will return to this discussion of contractualization in the public sector and some strategies to combat it.

An Open Letter of a Part-Time Instructor from PUP

Jose Mario De Vega

I am compelled both my indignation and academic duty to write to your newspaper to bring into your attention the grave injustices, the discrimination and the rampant exploitation of intellectual labor being systematically committed and still being practiced up to this very day by the university where I formerly taught.

My name is Jose Mario D. De Vega, an ex-faculty member of the Department of Philosophy and Humanities of the College of Arts and Letters of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP). For the record, I've been teaching at the said school since 2012 with a brief service interruption from 2014 up to 2016 due to the political power-play within, which is so bloody toxic.

As a part-time instructor, based on the law of the land, I am a contractual employee. Hence, I do not enjoy any of the rights and privileges of a regular government employee.

As a part-timer, the administration of PUP are exploiting and discriminating us. How? Please do allow me to explain even in brief their unscrupulous and hideous evil scheme.

As contractuels, we asked us to prepare and deliver presentations which has no honorarium whatsoever, they asked us to participate to the school activities beyond our time, with no compensation. They even used and utilized all our academic files, intellectual achievements and the whole of our academic dossiers for their so-called accreditation.

Later, they will used the result which comes from our accomplishments and achievements for their report which will be the basis of their performance bonus.

The regulars will have it, while we, the contractuels, which are one who contributed a lot for the said accomplishment report will not even get even a single centavo.

During the whole course of this pandemic, which is still on-going, we contractuels did not even received even a single peso from our school, as a form of "*ayuda*," "*abuloy*," "*donasyon*," "*limos*" or whatever!

The reason? We are not regular, we are contractual. Yet, it did not stop them last May 30th to issue a memo which requires faculties to prepare and create teaching materials in preparation to the so-called blended/on-line/virtual learning under the "new normal."

This is unjust, discriminatory and utterly unfair. When it comes to salaries, benefits and privileges, we contractuels are excluded, but when it comes to other added tasks and extra labor — which has no compensation nor allowances — why the hell we are included?

This is precisely the reason why I decided to leave that so-called "people's university" for the second time in my life. I can no longer tolerate their nefarious and insidious evil practices.

I would like to stress the following:

1. What is the moral and legal right of the administration of the PUP to issue that discriminatory memo?
2. How come that memo did not clearly stipulated that the same is only applicable to the regular employee?
3. If indeed, the said is only for the regular employee, how come it is course or transmitted and/or posted to the group chat of both the regular and part-time employees?
4. How come there has been no consultation that were conducted relative to the said memo?
5. Why it is that the administration did not even give anything whatsoever to the contractual employees of the university?

I've written to the Civil Service Commission (CSC) to complain about this fiasco and injustice. They required the administration to reply to my complaint. When I answered by way of a rejoinder, the CSC told me that their job is merely to ask the PUP to reply to my complaint and further advised me to transmit my complaint to the Commission on Higher Education.

This irritates me! So, I retorted: You are a constitutional creation, why the hell on earth you are directing me to go to an agency that is merely created by a special law?

I have also written to the Commission on Higher Education with the help and solidarity of the Teachers' Dignity Coalition. Until today, we are still waiting for the reply and/or report of those government agencies with regard to our queries and/or petition.

All I wanted is to get an official pronouncement from them on the morality, legality, constitutionality and propriety of the Memo issued by the administration of PUP.

In my view, the whole higher educational system is rubbish, broken and fucked up! It is based not on merit, justice and integrity, but rather on injustice, politics, exploitation, careerism, degradation, and indeed, bastardization of principles and prostitution of values!

This is a shame!

The constitution states that we have the so-called state protection of labor.

Now, the whole thing is absolutely clear. It's a blatant lie, a hoax and mere propaganda.

All I am asking you, sir/madame is simply to publish this letter of mine as a notice to the public and to the whole world.

I beseech thee, please give us the justice and due recognition that we justly deserve. Highlight our voices, print our images and fight with us in our quest for justice, dignity and honor!

We want our people to know and so as the rest of the world; the undeniably horrible and absolute horrendous plight of our part-time instructors from our so-called state universities and colleges all over the country.

Same with our front-liners, our dearest doctors and beloved nurses, we, contractuels/part-time instructors are also degraded, neglected, abused and exploited by a rubbish, incontestably unfair and utterly broken system!

Our respective schools abandoned us and the government betrayed us!

Shame! Shame! Super bloody shame!!!!

Thank you!

Respectfully yours,

Jose Mario De Vega

AB Political Science, 1999

MA in Philosophy, 2004

LIB, 2007

PhD, 2016 — present

An Afterword

Simoun Magsalin

De Vega's account is not unique. In many branches of government, there are two tiers of workers: plantilla and contractual. Plantilla workers have tenure and enjoy state-mandated benefits like a special pension in the GSIS. Contractual workers (also called job orders) are denied these state-mandated benefits and are not recognized as regular workers despite having the very same duties and responsibilities as regular workers. Contractual workers in government often work on a no-work-no-pay basis where they are denied sick leave and are excluded from most bonuses. They must have their contracts renewed every year. Contractual workers must also compete against each other should positions open up in the plantilla. However it is not uncommon that there are contractual workers in government who receive "loyalty awards" for working at that office for a decade or more yet have not yet been regularized.

The division the government places between plantilla and contractual workers are tools to divide the energies of the working class. The existence of a class of contractual workers is a threat — a blackmail even — to keep plantilla workers in line. Meanwhile the class of contractual workers are pitted against each other to compete for plantilla slots that may never even open. Government appointees enjoy their fat salaries on the top of the hierarchy while they blackmail the plantilla into submission and overwork the contractuales below them. Between competition and blackmail, government workers are made too preoccupied to organize into unions. The government workers' unions that do exist are toothless mechanisms as government workers do not have the right to strike.

What then are the anarchist tasks on the problem of contractualization in the public sector? The tasks of the anarchists is to promote a self-directed labor militancy within the state apparatus. The promotion of labor militancy within the state apparatus is not the endorsement of the state apparatus, just as neither is the promotion of labor militancy in private firms an endorsement of that firm. This self-directed labor militancy must include all workers — both plantilla and contractuales — and specifically exclude the bosses and appointees. Such a self-directed labor movement ought to be organized in an egalitarian manner where workers relate to each other as equals regardless of their position in the office hierarchy. Solidarity is the weapon against contractualization.

If the byzantine and convoluted regulations around government workers prevent them from forming formal state-recognized unions, then they can instead form strike committees around specific demands to manage their self-directed struggles. While these strike committees will not be recognized as official bodies for collective bargaining, they can still enforce demands given the right circumstances. Against the fact that government workers do not have the right to strike, we recall that striking was once an illegal act. *The only illegal strike is the strike that loses.* As contractual workers constitute a minority in some state agencies, it is critical that plantilla workers join them in withdrawing their labor and show that solidarity is stronger than the bosses. Together and self-directed, the working class can conquer gains from the bosses.

Information on direct action, self-directed labor militancy, and strike committees can be read from Part II of *Workers' Councils* by Anton Pannekoek. Methods for self-directed labor militancy can be read from Chapter 5 of *Anarcho-Syndicalism* by Rudolf Rocker.

If you are a contractual worker in government, reach out to your peers and discuss among yourselves the problems you face. When organized as a group, you are stronger together. Keep your activities away from the prying eyes and ears of the bosses as they will do everything in their power to frustrate you. Then as a group, reach out to labor groups in the country to ask who can help you. You can also reach out to *Bandilang Itim* who can point your group to other self-directed labor struggles in the country.

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