From the capitalist's point of view, temps have the characteristics of a very desirable employee. A “temp” is a person who works for an agency that “rents” his or her services to companies on a temporary basis, for time periods ranging from a few hours to several months.

Financially Vulnerable

First and foremost in importance to the capitalist, these workers are financially insecure. This is true whether they perform “white collar” work in offices or “blue collar” work in factories. Because of their need for money, they take just about any job at almost any pay, willingly do unpleasant work, work very hard, and don’t complain or argue. And, as an added bonus, they disappear when the job is done.

Why are temps in such need for money? One reason for the economic insecurity is the low rate of pay these workers receive. The agencies that send out workers on temporary assignments keep from 40 to 50 percent of the money the contracting company pays for the worker’s services. That doesn’t leave much money for the worker. Another reason for financial insecurity is that the worker doesn’t know when the current job will end.

Other people, both blue-collar and white-collar workers, are sent to a company to work as long as they are both needed and wanted. If the company they are serving needs the labor but doesn’t like the laborer, that worker will be sent away and another person will be inserted. If the labor is not needed, no amount of respect or affection will keep the temp employed. Sometimes they get advance warning that the assignment is coming to an end, and sometimes they do not. They never know if they will be earning money tomorrow.

Blue-Collar Temps

Perhaps the group of people with the most insecurity are those that work as day laborers in blue-collar positions. They report to the offices of the employing agent early in the morning, and they stand there with hat in hand and hope that on this day enough factories need enough fill-in
would not give them medical treatment regardless of need because they have neither health insurance nor money. The capitalists that use their labor pay them a little bit, sell the products for their true worth and pocket the difference as profits.

How Capitalists Benefit

Utilizing temporary workers is very good for the individual capitalist that uses their services. Temps are paid less per hour than permanent employees, and are frequently more productive. They are easy to acquire, easy to get rid of, easy to replace. Fluctuations in production can be covered with a minimum of expense and trouble. Labor relations are simply not an issue, as management can get away with doing just about anything to the temporary worker, short of actual physical assault. These workers can’t strike, unions won’t help them and the NLRB doesn’t care about them.

Utilizing temporary workers is also good for the capitalist class as a whole. Temps help keep permanent employees “in their place” by serving as an example for other workers as to how bad life could be for them if they don’t serve their masters well. Using temporary employees keeps labor costs down directly, because they don’t have to be supported during periods of reduced production demands. They also keep labor costs down indirectly, because they accept low wages and give capitalists leverage in resisting pressures to pay higher wages for their permanent employees.

Fighting Back

Temporary workers know they are used, abused and exploited. But they usually feel that they can’t do anything about the situation. This is not true. They can understand what is happening to them. They can talk with their coworkers about what is happening to all of them. They can communicate with like-minded people in the Socialist Labor Party, and get comfort and companionship from the association. They can join people who are trying to get rid of the whole system that is based on use and abuse of the entire working class. They can contribute to the building of a world based on dignity and cooperation instead of domination and exploitation.

If they will do these things, then temporary workers can then look forward to a world where their children and grandchildren will never have to know how it feels to go through all of this in order to earn a living.