

## REC leads challenge to agency workers legislation in second reading

Contractors still need to fear the [Agency Workers legislation](#) which is being read for the second time in the House of Commons in the week of May 6, 2008. The legislation would oblige contractors to have the same rights and perquisites as employees.

### Study Shows More Contracting and Temping Is Underway

The move comes at a time when the use of contractors and temporary workers is increasing at a significant rate in the UK. A joint study by the London-based [Recruitment and Employment Confederation](#) and the London-based research consultancy [KPMG](#) published on May 6, 2008 shows that more and more UK companies are filling staff vacancies, caused by downsizing during the economic slowdown, with more contractors and temp help. The cost of this would rise significantly if the Agency Workers legislation were to be enacted.

### REC Temp Week Leads Opposition

All of which means that continued opposition to the bill is extremely important for all of us in contracting. The REC is not only lobbying to oppose the bill, but at its annual Temporary Workers Week which will take place from June 2 to 6 this year, demonstrations of how temporary work is managed in the UK context will show that such regulations are not needed. "The REC will show how temporary workers profit from being able to work fixed periods at different companies and as such do not need the protections afforded to employees," an REC spokesman says.

These demonstrations will give the lie to the continual propaganda from the trade unions which depicts contractors as weak and exploited. "In addition, the overwhelmingly bleak picture of agency work that is painted by the trade unions to justify the need for more regulation is not one that the vast majority of agencies or even workers would recognise," comments Tom Hadley, external relations director for the REC.

Hadley adds: "Regulations are already in place which protect temporary workers from victimisation and exploitation; these regulations should be applied rather than additional burdens being created for the industry to bear."

### Will We Contractors Be Exempt?

Although the bill's sponsor, MP Andrew Miller, has said that [high-technology contractors would be exempt](#) from the proposed legislation, that qualification has not yet been made official.

Further, the European directive on Agency Workers will be discussed at the Council of Ministers in June, as the French presidency has made clear. Should the UK national law not concord with the European law, the UK could be forced to change its version.

### Vague and Unworkable

But the REC is equally concerned with the quality of the national legislation which it has branded "vague and unworkable."

Says Hadley: "The equal treatment proposals in the bill are extremely vague and are simply unworkable in practice due to the bureaucracy and uncertainty that would be created, as well as the fact that pay for the vast majority of workers in the UK is individually negotiated."

All of which means that it's important to write your MPs at this time and let them know that you want this bill opposed. We contractors are only a few hundred thousand, and the trade unions have millions, so it is especially important that we make our voices heard.

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“ Temporary workers profit from being able to work fixed periods at different companies and so do not need the protections afforded to employees ”

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“ The national legislation is vague, unworkable, and risks being superseded by the European Directive ”

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