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If The Unemployment Rate Is So Low: Why Do I Feel So Insecure?

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Abstract: Changes which have occurred in the labour market over the last two decades have resulted in high levels of hidden unemployment. Many people are becoming increasingly aware of the chasm between the official employment statistics and the real extent of unemployment as those around them find it more and more difficult to find work. Those who are employed feel increasingly insecure about their jobs and are often employed in jobs which are casual, part-time or for which they are over-qualified. Certain groups, which will be highlighted in this paper, are more likely to become part of the hidden unemployed. In the first part of this paper, the connections between hidden unemployment, globalisation of the Australian economy and recent neo liberal policy regimes will be analysed. Using evidence from in-depth interviews with a number of employees, the second part of this paper will focus on how job insecurity has impacted on the day to day lives of individuals.

Introduction

The ideology of neo liberalism invokes a picture of a world where markets rule, unfettered by state interference. Yet, in reality, the implementation of neo liberal policies has involved increasingly regulatory punitive types of state intervention which have promoted the interests of capital at the expense of labour. Within this philosophy, those who have been marginalised as a result of neo liberalism have been dealt with punitively and have been blamed for their own marginalisation. Outlined within this paper will be the rise of the neo liberal agenda and the many paths which this agenda has taken. The connections between hidden unemployment, globalisation of the Australian economy and recent neo liberal policy regimes will be analysed. While the present Australian government has boasted about record lows in unemployment, it is not only labour market analysts but also many from the broader Australian community who are becoming increasingly aware of the chasm between the official employment statistics and the real extent of unemployment. This paper will highlight the extent to which unemployment has become hidden in Australia, outlining the particular groups in Australia who are more vulnerable to hidden unemployment. The multitude of barriers which prevent these groups from accessing employment will be discussed. In Australia there has been an increased trend towards those who either have too many hours work, much of which takes the form of unpaid overtime, and those with not enough hours of work. Using evidence from in-depth interviews with a number of employees, the second part of this paper will focus on how job insecurity and work intensification has impacted on the day to day lives of individuals.

Globalisation, neo liberalism and the nation state

After the election of conservative governments in both the United States and Britain in the 1980s, national variants of the economic philosophy, now widely known as neo liberalism, were developed. Prior to this, as in most industrialised countries, the economic principles attributed to John Maynard Keynes shaped public policy from the late 1940s until the mid 1970s. In the national variants of the welfare state, Keynesian economics was seen as a

solution to the economic crises, specifically depressions resulting in high unemployment, the most devastating of which had occurred in the interwar years. Keynesian economics proposed state management of the market, so that in times of recession the state would spend and create employment and during full employment and an upturn it would reduce spending to prevent inflation. By contrast, the founders of neo liberal economic philosophy, Von Hayek and Friedman, believed that the success of the economy was dependent on free markets in trade (for both goods and services), finance (including the currency) and labour. Economic dislocation occurring as a result of oil price rises in 1974 was an important impetus for the rise of monetarism (Cowling and Mitchell 2003:212). As a result of the emergence of contradictory symptoms of stagflation throughout the industrialised world, Keynesian state intervention was seen as having become dysfunctional to restoring economic health and, in particular, reducing inflation.

The Keynesian notion of full employment was reconceptualised in terms of the NAIRU, a non-accelerating rate of unemployment (Cowling and Mitchell 2003:212). The NAIRU purports that there is a fixed level of unemployment which if an economy goes below will lead to wage-induced inflation (Phillips 2004:38). A proposition contained within this model is that the effects of monetary policy put in place to fight inflation or to reduce government debt will only have a temporary detrimental influence on levels of unemployment (Stegman and Stegman 2004:743-744). Unemployment is viewed to be a labour market problem which can be addressed by micro economic reform leading to increased market flexibility, allowing for a more efficient way of matching the demand and supply of labour resulting in reduced structural unemployment.

Deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation have become the three great economic principles of neo liberal economies (Martin and Schumann, 1998:109) accompanied by what Peck (2004) has termed a shift from welfare to workfare states. The ideology of neo liberalism has emerged as a commitment to the logic of competitive market forces with aggressive state downsizing and public service reform.

One of the main characteristics of neo liberal globalisation today is the appearance of a global intellectual hegemony. This hegemony is perpetuated and maintained through the constant and extensive use of a small number of 'buzzwords' and phrases which serves to legitimise and create consent for what would otherwise be some very questionable processes and practices (Gosovic, 2000: 448). The use of certain emotive terms bestows neo liberal changes with positive qualities while simultaneously undermining any alternatives to neo liberalism. Neo liberal globalisation is identified as modern, rational and necessary (Gosovic, 2000:450).

There is, however, a gap between the ideology of neo liberalism and the way it operates on an everyday level. While the ideology of neo liberalism conjures up an image of a world where markets rule free from state regulation, in practice, the implementation of neo liberal policies has involved increasingly punitive types of state intervention (Brenner and Theodore 2002:352). Neo liberalism has involved a transformation of the role of nation state rather than its destruction (Peck 2004:394). Neo liberalism does not involve the replacement of the state with the market, as markets themselves cannot self-regulate. It has not involved a single path but varies in character through its interaction with differing concrete institutional policy settings (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). While Thatcherism and Reaganism represented essentially radical regimes of neo liberal restructuring throughout the 1980's in Britain and the United States, more moderate types of neo liberal policies were put in place at the same time in countries, such as, Canada, New Zealand Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy, and Sweden (Brenner and Theodore 2002:350).

Neo liberal policies involve both internal local modification and external global modification. While neo liberalism has become hegemonic, in practice neo liberal imperatives merge with a number of varying state forms to produce particular outcomes (Peck 2004:395). According to O’Riain (2000:188), three different types of economies emerge in neo liberal globalisation, depending on whether a nation state is liberal, a social rights state or a developing state. The purpose of the Liberal State, such as Australia, is the endorsement of the market into all areas of society and even into the state itself. The state is needed to generate the conditions that allow for a free market society (O’Riain 2000:193).

Peck and Tickell (2002:400) claim that one of the most salient characteristics of neo liberalism is its ability to transform itself. In demonstrating the transformative capacities of neo liberalism, Brenner and Theodore (2002:364-370) highlight moments of ‘destructiveness’ and moments of ‘creativity’ within the neo liberal project. Examples of destructiveness include; the undermining of national collective bargaining agreements and state regulations which emphasise equal employment opportunity and occupational health and safety; the destruction of the welfare state and the dismantling of publicly funded skills and training programs. Examples of the way in which neo liberalism has modified itself have involved; the creation of workplace flexibility, non standard work hours, the increased use of community based organisations for the provision of social services and the development of work readiness programs aimed at placing workers into low paid contingent work. Thus, the neo liberal project is not only perpetuated through the promotion of market driven economic growth but strategies and forms of crisis management are implemented to ensure its continuation.

Australia and its neo liberal agenda

Since 1983, the Australian Labor government started to move towards a neo liberal economic agenda and made moves to liberalise Australia’s financial system (Kaptein, 1993:93, 95). Both Hawke’s (1983-1994) and then Keating’s (1994-1996) adherence to the free market programmes became stronger and stronger in the latter part of Labor’s time in government (Quiggen, 1998:5). As national unemployment rates rose sharply again in the early 1990s, after steady falls during the 1980s, the Labor Government introduced specific labour market policies (the ‘Working Nation’ reforms: see Fagan, 1994) after community consultations and pressure from the labour movement.

The conservative (Liberal-National Coalition) Howard government was elected in 1996 on a platform which was more recognisably neo liberal across a spectrum of economic and social policies, notably in labour market reform. This included the 1996 Workplace Relations Act which marked a major shift towards a policy framework designed to severely curtail the power of unions in relation to bargaining over employee rights and job security, as well as wage levels, and to radically restructure the Industrial Relations Commission and its powers to arbitrate in industrial disputes and establish industrial awards judicially (see Sadler and Fagan, 2004). After the recent federal election returned control of the Senate to the Liberal-National Coalition from mid 2005, the government is proposing to introduce new reforms. These reforms provide evidence that rather than promoting deregulation, the government is promoting further regulation to support the objectives of capital at the expense of labour. These changes will involve a further winding back of the allowable provisions in industrial awards, and a package of measures designed to increase ‘flexibility’ in the labour market, widely interpreted as encouraging reductions in minimum wages. Awards will in future be set by what the government refers to as an ‘independent’ body which they will implement, titled “The Australian Fair Pay Commission”. These reforms will boost the prevalence of

individualised employment contracts and further curtail the role of trade unions in regulating the labour market.

While some changes to the labour market may have been necessary as a result of globalisation, the real threat to the working conditions of Australians has had more to do with the Federal Government's neo liberal reform agenda than global economic circumstances, the economic policies of other countries or the strategies of transnational corporations operating in Australia (Burgess and Macdonald 1998:166,149). Countries in Europe, particularly Nordic countries, have managed to compete effectively in the international market while maintaining high levels of unionisation and protecting the rights of their employees (Lansbury 2004:104).

According to seventeen of Australia's leading academic researchers in the field of Industrial Relations and labour market issues, one of the major labour market challenges which Australia faces is a labour and skills shortage exacerbated by an ageing population (Sydney Industrial relations Report Card Overview 2005:1). The further workplace reforms which the Howard Government intends to put in place will do little to reduce this shortage. In many way the increased involuntary casualisation that will occur as a result of the reforms will further exacerbate skills shortages and increase hidden employment.

A major feature of labour restructuring over the past two decades has been the rise of casual work which has risen during both periods of employment contraction and employment growth (May, Campbell and Burgess 2005:3). The ABS definition of unemployment does not include those who are under-employed and would like to work more hours. The proportion of people working part-time in the workforce has grown from around 6 per cent in the 1960s to around 30 per cent today which is one of the highest part-time rates, at least for males, in the OECD world (Argy 2005:76). While some people voluntary choose part-time and casual work, a large component of part-time work, which usually involves casual employment, is involuntary, with people preferring to work longer hours (Burgess 1997:3) thus constituting part of the hidden unemployed. May et al (2005:7) argue that the Howard government's reforms provide increased opportunities for individual workplace to increase their use of casual labour as opposed to providing secure permanent employment. As casual workers are usually excluded from formal training programs and career development, an increasingly casualised workforce will work against addressing skills shortages. The lack of training and acquisition of skills as a result of casualisation will increase structural unemployment in the future where people will not have the skills to fill future job vacancies. In addition, it is generally those who are casually employed whose employment history is often characterised by break in the continuity of employment (Burgess 1997:841) and thus the increase in casual jobs will lead to further unemployment.

The government's plan to remove the existing 'no disadvantage test' as part of these new regulations, which stipulates that workers cannot be worse off on a contract compared to a relevant award, means that employers will be able to offer contracts to individual workers that undermine almost every entitlement of the set award. Within the extensive taxpayer funded advertising campaign to promote these new regulations the Howard Government claims that employers will not be able to undermine the conditions set by this body without the agreement of the employee.

In negotiating new workplace agreements certain award entitlements will be protected in the new system, though bargaining can occur on these entitlements and approval of employees is required to change them (Australian government 2005).

This statement obscures the huge disparity in power between the majority of potential employees and their potential employers when it comes to negotiating job conditions. Part-time employees are further disadvantages when it comes to any bargaining power. The

Howard government has framed these new regulations in terms of increasing workplace flexibility to promote the economic prosperity and international competitiveness of Australia. However, as Argy (2005:93) claims, the labour market at present is not an impediment to workplace flexibility and international efficiency and any advantages gained by increasing the powers of employers may be undermined by increased employee negativity, low morale and mistrust leading to intensified workplace disharmony.

Skills shortages have arisen from structural and persistent cyclical unemployment. According to Stegman (2001:8 and 2004:744), differentiating between cyclical unemployment, which is unemployment resulting from downturn in the economy, and structural unemployment is often difficult, as downturns in the economy can contribute to structural unemployment. This is because high periods of unemployment can result in reduced job skills, search effectiveness and job readiness for unemployed individuals making them less suitable for available jobs. In addition, an individual's desirability as employee is measured by some employers according to the amount of time that the individual has been unemployed with the longer the duration of unemployment the less likely that the individual will be given the job. The average duration of unemployment has risen sharply over the years with the average duration of unemployment being three weeks in 1996 in comparison to 50 weeks in 2003 (Cowling and Mitchell 2003:210).

The Howard Government has framed their new reforms as creating even greater economic efficiency and has cited low unemployment figures as evidence for past success. Last year the minister for employment and workplace relations informed the Australian population of yet another good year with unemployment rates being as low at 5.2 per cent, the lowest rate since 1976 which he stated was the result of good economic management and reforms (Andrews 2004, cited in Barrett, Burgess and Campbell 2005:133). However, many people are becoming increasingly aware of the chasm existing between official employment statistics and the real extent of unemployment as those people around them, such as family members, friends and neighbours, find it more and more difficult to find employment. When they do, often they can only access employment which is casual, insecure, part-time or for which they are overqualified (ACOSS 2003:10). The definition of unemployment, used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in their monthly Labour force survey, counts anyone who worked for one or more hours in the reference week as employed (ABS year book, 2005). If a person had to be employed for a whole day to count as being employed then Barrett Burgess and Campbell (2005) argue that the unemployment rate would go up to 12 per cent.

Uncovering the extent to which unemployment has become hidden elucidates why the number of people dependent on income support payments has not declined at the same rate as official unemployment figures. Many people relying on this support are part of the hidden unemployed or are working so few hours that they need top up payments. These people are also not getting the assistance they need to get back into the workforce or to work more hours (ACOSS 2003:8) and this situation will only get worse with Howard's new industrial relations reforms for the reasons already discussed above.

Hidden unemployment

Who are they?

People not included in the official unemployment statistics include those who have given up looking for employment, those who have barriers to gaining accessible employment, or those who are not working enough hours to survive financially (ACOSS 2003:10). When the labour market survey is carried out, anyone who has only looked in a newspaper or read a job

advertisement is not seen to be looking actively for work and thus is not counted as unemployed (ABS, 2000).

Academics in both Australia and Europe have argued that one of the ways in which unemployment has become increasingly hidden has been the increasing placement of the unemployed on sickness and disability benefits (Mooij, 1999, Beatty and Fothergill 2002, Barrett, Burgess and Campbell 2005). For example, Beatty and Fothergill (2002:815) carried out a study of hidden unemployment in Barrow in England. A shipyard at Barrow employed up to 70 per cent of all working age males who lived in Barrow until the late 1980s when it began to downsize, eliminating 9,000 jobs. While there was a move to create jobs in lighter manufacturing industries, the number of jobs created were outweighed by the job losses. When the researchers interviewed those who were retrenched, many of these men did not describe themselves as unemployed having given up looking for work. For less than half of those who had lost their jobs, it was not ill health or injury which had been the cause of this job loss but rather redundancy (Beatty and Fothergill 2002:819). Beatty and Fothergill (2002:819) claim it is not that these men's health limitations were not genuine but rather that in a locality where there were many more jobs vacancies, these men would be employed. In Australia, between 1983 and 2003, the greatest change in the 'not in the labour force' male category was the increase in those who were categorised as disabled, up from 19 per cent to 28 per cent (Barrett et al, 2005:136).

There is evidence that since the early 1990s, unemployment in Australia has progressively become more concentrated within particular households and localities. There has been an increase from 13 per cent to 16 per cent of dependant children living in households where no one has employment. Unemployment is particularly high in South Australia and in Tasmania and in other states occurs more in regional and rural towns (ACOSS 2003:10, Argy 2005:78). According to Graham (2002:1), there are now whole families and complete communities only marginally attached to the formal labour force. The increase in the number of localities where a majority of families have no work or are underemployed is leading to great inequalities which have severe social ramifications.

Groups more likely to become part of these expanding categories of the hidden unemployed are mothers, mature age people, Indigenous people, people with disabilities and recently arrived migrants, including skilled migrants from non English-speaking backgrounds. Many mothers cannot gain access to desired employment because of a lack of child care while many mature age people have taken early retirement but would rather be working (ACOSS 2003: 9 and 15). In November 2004, the 'official unemployment rate' for migrants was 5.6 per cent in comparison to 4.9 per cent for those born in Australia. Over half of the 661,100 migrants who arrived in Australia with a non-school qualification had a bachelors degree or higher and yet only half of these qualifications were recognised in Australia (ABS 2004).

Alongside migrants, many people are increasingly working in jobs which do not require the skills that they have acquired. It is becoming progressively more difficult for young people to acquire secure jobs once they have finished their education. Since the mid 1990s, while there has been an increase in people undertaking further education, many people are then not able to use these educational skills and qualifications in the workplaces in which they are employed and are instead employed in unskilled work (ACOSS 2003:38). Yet, Australia is arguably facing both a skills and labour shortage as discussed earlier in this paper. In the latter part of 2004, there were a rising number of employers who were complaining about shortage of machinists, electricians, fitters and turners, toolmakers and welders (Argy 2005:80). Due to the ageing population, the education and training of people is important so that there will be people who will be able to fulfil the vacancies created by the retirement of the baby boomers.

According to Summers (2003:59), federal government statistics in 2002 show that there were approximately 2.4 million women in Australia who were categorised as not being in the labour force. 500,000 of these women said that they would like to work but could not, 15 per cent because they were studying and an incredible 32 per cent (164,000) because they could not find or afford childcare. In many childcare centres there are now two year waiting lists with more than 50 babies on each of these waiting lists.

While unemployment is the result of cyclical and structural factors, the jobless are often blamed for their own unemployment. Argy states (2005:81-83) while much attention has been given to those who are unemployed through choice, the meagreness of Australia's unemployment benefits and the punitive work tests that have been put in place, hardly make voluntary joblessness a very attractive option. Also, the choice to be unemployed flies in the face of empirical evidence which suggests that the unemployed experience much lower levels of wellbeing than their employed counterparts. The main obstacle that job seekers face in finding jobs results from a lack of relevant jobs (Argy 2005:81-83).

Lengthy durations of unemployment result in individuals experiencing low self-esteem, a loss of work skills, network contacts and know-how, making it harder for these individuals to find employment. This vicious circle not only represents a loss for these individuals but is also a waste of national economic potential (Argy 2005:79). Argy (2005:90) states that coupled with schemes to promote labour participation, generous welfare payments are beneficial not only for those who are unable to find employment but also for the communities in which they live. Better living conditions make individuals more able to re-enter the workforce when there are available jobs and also lead to reduced crime rate and better environments for the dependants of those who are unemployed.

The present disproportionate allocation of working hours is having a major impact on the personal well-being of many Australians. On the one hand there are the unemployed and underemployed suffering from poor self-esteem, depression and family breakdowns and on the other hand there are those who have lost control over their working hours and are working excessively long hours, who are reporting higher degrees of stress, anxiety and depression (Argy 2005:79-80). Increased job insecurity has resulted in many people feeling that if they do not comply with huge amounts of unpaid overtime that is now expected of them that they may risk losing their jobs. Thus, many people are experiencing a combination of work intensification and also high levels of job insecurity. A study conducted by Vogl (2004) highlights the way in which increased workloads and job insecurity have impacted on the day to day lives of employees.

Workplace changes - a qualitative study

This study involved qualitative in depth interviews with forty-seven people working in middle and working class occupations situated in a range of public and private sector workplaces in Sydney and the outer Sydney region. This was a qualitative study and thus unlike quantitative research, the main focus of this study was not the frequency of issues as in quantitative research but was rather concerned with the depth of issues which employees faced as a result of workplace changes. The participants in this study were ascertained through purposeful sampling. The rationale behind the choice of sampling was the decision to gather insight and in-depth understanding rather than to make empirical generalisations.

The publicly owned workplaces from which people in this study were drawn included an ambulance service, a council waste service, a high school and a counselling service located within the tertiary education sector. The privately owned workplaces included a building site, an insurance company, two IT companies, a retail store, a steel manufacturing company and

two workplaces from the hospitality sector. The aim of the study was to ascertain worker's own interpretations of how changes in the workplace had impacted on their lives and social relationships. Most of the workplaces in which interviews were carried out had been through restructures and the majority of participants talked about how much greater their workloads had become.

When asked what changes had occurred in their workplace in the last five years nearly everybody stated that the workload had increased significantly. While some of the employees did not have the amount of hours that they wanted, when they were at work they were expected to work much harder. The most often repeated comment was that "staffing levels were down, people had left and weren't being replaced". Irene, a working class woman, who worked in a large retail store claimed that:

The work load has tripled, the conditions are worse, if you dropped dead, they wouldn't even bother to replace you, they would just sweep you up and let your body rot.

While a few believed that their workplaces had always been dynamic, most discussed the extensive continual changes which had occurred in workplaces in latter years. A few saw these changes positively but most felt that these particular changes, or change itself, was negative. Ruth, a middle class employee and a self confessed "work-a-holic" who worked for an IT company, described her feelings toward changes in the workplace in the following manner:

You spend a lot of time here. You spend more time at work than you do with your husband or wife that you choose. You don't always choose your job, you certainly don't choose the circumstances, and in today's world you start with one job, and tomorrow it might be gone or be another, and you have to just be able to deal with that. I personally think that a lot of the problems in the workplace is dealing with change. People don't like change.

According to Peter, a computer consultant who worked at an insurance company:

Over the last two to three years, people are feeling a lot more threatened in their jobs and that is because of the changes that are happening in the workplace. Because we have gone through about three or four restructures in the organisation in the last three years and there is no guarantee for anyone right from top to bottom. So people are feeling a lot more insecure in the workplace right now.

While many of the participants in this study were spending more time at work as a result of longer working hours and this undermined the maintenance and development of their personal relationships, they were simultaneously feeling threatened in their 'working lives' as the above two quotes highlight. As a result of feeling threatened many had become more focused on their 'private lives', particularly family relationships that they saw as providing them with the solidarity and meaning that they could no longer always find in their 'working lives'.

People reported being very "tired", "frantic", "stressed" and "change fatigued". Some stated that they had high blood pressure related to workplace stress, ulcers and other physical ailments from constant deadlines. Most of the workplaces had been through restructures. These changes had been described by participants as "unsettling", "stressful" and "a roller coaster ride". One of the companies had recently merged with another company, which had resulted in a number of redundancies. The company had changed the type of business they were doing, lots of staff had gone and new people had been brought in, with many of the employees experiencing difficulties in adapting to these changes. Calvin, a manager at this company, said that "everybody was suffering from insecurity, which spilled over into their personal relationships".

In general, the participants in the overall study felt that job security was a thing of the past. They believed that anyone who thought that job security still existed was "having themselves

on". Job security affected people's relationships with some people becoming very negative while others became aggressive. An operations Manager who worked at the company that had just had a merger, said that productivity and morale was very low as a result of the redundancies, "why work hard when your job might be next on the line". Rohan, who had lost some of his friends from his team as a result of this restructure, felt angry with the company and felt that it had affected the positive atmosphere among his team.

Many of the working class employees were worried about the tenure of their employment, and some saw collective solidarity in the form of the union as the only means of protection against job insecurity. Some workplaces had a strong union that tried to ensure that all positions became permanent. Deb, a sales assistant at the retail store, said that job insecurity affected how she felt about management, and also resulted in "workers backstabbing each other". She said it was not really their fault, everyone was just "so overworked and stressed". All four women that I interviewed from the retail store complained about the poor staffing levels. Leon, a boilermaker, who was insecure about his job because of proposed plans to contract out this work, said that insecurity both divided and united workers. Leon felt that competition was encouraged to break up solidarity among the workers. Some stuck together while others thought that if they did everything the company wanted they would then keep their jobs. It was not just the working class employees but middle class ones as well who said competition had increased among those who were insecure. The middle class tended to cope with this insecurity in a more individualised way.

Some people believed that redundancies were useful in removing the "dead wood" and "passengers". The phrases such as those used above helped to obscure the negative impacts of structural changes by making people appear individually responsible for these changes and thus to blame. While some had internalised these beliefs, others thought that it did not matter how hard one worked or whether one was good or not. "If a company required fewer workers, they required fewer people". There was often no link between a worker's contribution and what happened to them and this eroded trust.

Conclusion

The inevitability of globalisation and international competitiveness has been used by the present government to introduce labour market policies which have seriously eroded the working conditions of Australian workers. By exploring the variety of ways in which neo liberalism has interacted with specific institutionalised forms, the above paper highlights the agency which nation states have in moulding the Capital/Labour relationship within their own countries. The Howard government has chosen to introduce a neo liberal reform agenda which has involved the implementation of policies which have led to an increase in non standard forms of labour and other forms of hidden unemployment. Unemployment is becoming increasingly concentrated within particular locations and among certain groups. Australia is arguably a facing a skills and labour shortage which will be further exacerbated by the Howard Government's new workplace reforms. These reforms will lead to increased casual part-time employment with many employees missing out on training programs and the skills which they need to gain meaningful employment. The barriers which prevent these people from working to their potential need to be addressed and on the basis of this information appropriate support and training programs need to be put in place to meet the needs of both potential employers and workers. Policies need to be implemented to create meaningful secure employment with employees being able to work the hours which they need to sustain quality lives. The undermining of the rights of workers will have huge ramifications for individuals, their families and the wider communities in which they live, and also, for many employers in the long-term. The qualitative study described in this paper suggests that

previous workplace reforms which have led to increased job insecurity have already had a negative impact on the quality of life of many Australian workers and to an extent the workplaces in which they are employed.

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