



# Working Women's Information Service

The Working Women's Centre, 258 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000. Tel: 654 1228

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## "NEW PERSPECTIVES ON PART-TIME WORK - PART I"

In June 1976<sup>(1)</sup> and again in May 1978<sup>(2)</sup> we discussed various aspects of part-time work. The subject has continued to exercise the minds of many people since then. Thousands of words have been spoken and written on the subject by academics, economists, educationists, employers, politicians, unionists and representatives of lobby groups.

Print media, radio and television have given considerable coverage to what a recent ABC TV programme<sup>(3)</sup> called the 'Part-Time Revolution'. It may indeed be a revolution, albeit a quiet one - occurring, as Joan Ford of Future Lobby, says,

*"by stealth without sufficient union or community awareness of the magnitude of the change and in many instances without adequate safeguards for employees such as the extension of many of the conditions of employment which have been fought for and established for fulltime members of the workforce".(4)*

Some unions may not be aware of the full extent of the change but others have been concerned for some time that the growing incidence of part-time work has been at the expense of workers who want full-time work and that this trend is eroding the pay and conditions won so painstakingly by the union movement.

### WHO WANTS PART-TIME WORK ?

The main advocates for part-time work are professional people and middle-class women married to men on high or middle incomes. Their proposition is that part-time workers should have, on a pro-rata basis, all the benefits and entitlements enjoyed by full-time workers (e.g. paid public holidays, annual leave plus 17½% loading, sick, maternity and long-service leave, superannuation etc.) plus the same opportunities for promotion as full-time employees. They argue that most jobs, including academic, professional and senior management, could be shared by two or more people, each working on a part-time basis. However the great majority of people who actually work part-time are women in low-status, low-paid jobs in the service and recreation industries and they are regarded almost universally by employers as temporary or casual.

Employers are rather coy about their attitudes to part-time work. When pressed for an opinion they manage to give the impression that it serves the interests of employees rather than those of management. However Timothy Rohl of Troy Staff and Training Centre is more realistic. He states that "there will be no part-time work if the market doesn't want it or is reluctant to use it".<sup>(5)</sup>

Table 1: EMPLOYED PERSONS: FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME STATUS

	Full-time		Part-time		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Aug. 1970	4,825,900	89.44	569,700	10.56	5,395,600
" 1975	5,046,800	86.40	793,400	13.60	5,841,200
" 1976	5,036,900	85.40	860,900	14.60	5,897,800
" 1977	5,094,600	84.97	900,900	15.03	5,995,500
" 1978	5,018,100	84.06	951,500	15.94	5,969,600
" 1979	5,084,200	84.15	957,300	15.85	6,041,500
July 1980	5,267,700	83.88	1,012,400	16.12	6,280,100

Source: ABS Labour Force Cat. Nos. 6203 & 6204.

## WHO ARE THE PART-TIME WORKERS?

Eighty per cent of Australian part-time workers are women. Most of them are married, widowed or single mothers. They are employed as sales assistants, waitresses, typists, clerical assistants, bar attendants, ticket sellers, door-to-door sales agents, cleaners and seasonal fruit-pickers and food-processing factory workers. Because of society's attitude that men are the primary bread-winners and that women's main job is to bear and rear children, women are, as Weeks says, "grateful for a job at all, let alone a well-paid secure job (and) are all too willing candidates for temporary and insecure jobs". (11)

### PART-TIME OR CASUAL ?

The Australian Bureau of Statistics makes no distinction between part-time and casual or seasonal workers. Casual and seasonal workers are not entitled to annual, sick, maternity or long-service leave nor are they paid for public holidays and they can be retrenched without notice. They are often expected to work irregular hours, which makes it impossible to augment their income by other work. A recent advertisement<sup>(12)</sup> required cleaners to work Mon-Thur. 5.30-7.30 pm, Fri. 9-11 pm, Sat. 12 noon - 2 pm. Wages were not stated. Casual workers are supposed to receive a higher hourly rate than regular employees to compensate for the disadvantages but extra demands are often made on them. For instance, almost all advertisements for cleaners and babysitters stipulate that applicants must own a car but no mention is made of an allowance to run it.

### . . OR TEMPORARY ?

Many women have been employed by the same employer for years but are nevertheless regarded as temporary or casual because they work on a part-time basis. They are excluded from most of the benefits extended to fulltime employees. While some are paid for annual leave and for public holidays falling on days on which they would normally work, hardly any qualify for long-service leave or superannuation and many are not paid for sick leave. Yet, because their work is regular, they seldom receive the penalty loadings applicable to casual work. A minimal amount of training is given, promotion is virtually unknown and they are often left monotonous boring jobs which are despised by fulltime employees. For instance the Shell Company uses part-timers for opening envelopes, a task for which they consider they cannot use fulltime workers. (13)

### . . OR CONTRACT ?

A number of large international companies avoid responsibilities under the Labour and

Industry Acts by contracting with people to work as sales agents or demonstrators on a part-time basis. Usually the company pays a wage for a certain number of hours per week but forbids the women to work for any other employer in their spare time. In most cases they must use their own cars and telephones and their own homes as offices or distribution points. Of course these women receive no pay for any leave or public holidays and they are not eligible for any other staff benefits. They are seldom given any training or promotion and can be retrenched without notice. They are frequently expected to work outside normal office hours but are not paid penalty rates. The companies using their services avoid all overhead expenses. One woman who responded to a number of advertisements found that, as soon as she enquired about workers' compensation, she was told she would be unsuitable for the job even though she had excellent qualifications and had had a great deal of experience. (14)

### ONE WOMAN'S STORY

"I and many women like me are being employed on a part-time basis. We are doing the work of sales representatives. We have to provide our own cars. We are told we are being paid Commercial Travellers Association rates when there is no CTA rate for part-time work. We are told we are not covered by any award. Tax is not taken out of any pay and the companies don't pay payroll tax. We get no pro rata holiday or sick pay and no 17½% holiday loading. The companies don't take out workers' compensation cover for us and we are not paid enough to warrant taking out our own cover. Companies in this industry are employing several women to do the job of one sales representative and in this way are saving themselves huge amounts of money." (15)

### SCHOOL STUDENTS

Many large companies are reducing their costs still further by employing school children as casual labour in service industries which used to be staffed mainly by women.

In August 1970 only 8.3 percent of teenage employees were part-time workers. By August 1979 16.6 per cent of employed teenage boys and 25.5 per cent of girls were part-time employees and 72 per cent of them were aged only 15 or 16. (16)

Most of these youngsters work as sales assistants, cashiers, packers, wrappers, waiters, cleaners, labourers and short order cooks. (17)

Most jobs average less than ten hours per week. Almost all are casual, nonunionized and available only in the evenings or weekends.

## PART-TIME WORK OR PART-TIME UNEMPLOYMENT?

There is evidence to suggest that the growth in part-time work is largely a camouflage for the growth in unemployment. A first glance at Table 1 might suggest that the extra 884,500 jobs created between 1970 and 1980 represented a substantial increase in new employment opportunities. However, when we compare the rate of growth of the civilian population aged 15 years and over with the growth in employment, we find that the former has increased by 21.2 per cent whereas the number of people employed has increased by only 14.1%.<sup>(21)</sup>

More than half of the new jobs are part-time and when we look at the situation on an industry basis we find that many of these jobs have been created at the expense of full-time jobs.

Paul Lyneham, in a recent "Four Corners" programme, claimed that between 1973 and 1979 there was a loss of more than 15,000 full-time jobs in the entertainment and recreation industry with an increase of 32,000 part-time jobs. In manufacturing, he said, nearly 170,000 full-time jobs had disappeared in exchange for only 10,000 part-time jobs; in construction a loss of 51,000 full-time jobs with a gain of 22,000 part-time jobs; in wholesale and retail full-time down 34,000 and part-time up 78,000.<sup>(22)</sup>

Most of the new jobs are in the service area. In fact nearly 80 per cent of all new jobs created between 1972 and 1979 were in Community Services.<sup>(23)</sup> Many people in this industry are employed on a short-term temporary basis and, even though they may be employed full-time while the job lasts, cuts in government funds for community projects and staff ceiling limits in the health and education departments have already curbed growth in this area.

### SOCIAL CHANGE

Malcolm Smith, representing the Institute of Personnel Management, Australia, says:

*"The downturn in the world's economy has caused employers to reduce some fulltime jobs into part-time jobs . . . There is a definite social change taking place and, as the economy becomes tougher, employers are becoming more cost-conscious, preferring to hire temporaries rather than commit themselves to permanent staff . . . Generally part-time workers do not enjoy the security of fulltime staff or have the opportunities for advancement, job growth or retraining."*<sup>(24)</sup>

It is significant that Mr. Smith uses the terms 'temporaries' and 'part-time workers' as synonyms. Weeks noted the same habit in the Business Periodicals Index.<sup>(25)</sup>

Barry Hughes, Reader in Economics at Flinders University, says:

*"The economic backdrop to part-time work development in the first half of the 1980s will be one of sustained, high unemployment . . . It will also disguise the extent to which real moves towards greater proportionate part-time work are occurring, for our basic labour market statistics are not structured well enough to distinguish easily between part-time work and disguised unemployment."*<sup>(26)</sup>

### UNDER-EMPLOYMENT

Hughes points to the growth in the number of part-time workers who would prefer to work more hours - from 120,500 in 1978 to 149,300 in 1980 - an increase of 28.8%.

*"Bearing in mind," he says, that the labour force survey requires a minimum of only one hour of paid work during a week to qualify for employment status, it is difficult to know how much of this involuntary growth is really disguised unemployment, how much a resort to casual work such as odd jobs and gardening when nothing else is available because of the poor state of the economy. There has been a high discrepancy between the payroll tax based civilian employees series and the labour force survey estimates of employment. Now the former has had publication suspended."*<sup>(27)</sup>

In fact, although the number of part-time workers has increased, the average number of hours worked by each part-timer declined by 9.1 per cent during the year ended May 1980.<sup>(28)</sup>

### GOVERNMENT VIEW

The Victorian Premier, Mr. Hamer, is on record as saying that "part-time employment was one way of effectively tackling unemployment and providing greater flexibility in jobs under fair conditions". He also said that it could be a useful prelude to retirement for some employees and that "many two-income families would be happy to become one-and-a-half-income families and enjoy the benefits of reducing working time while not losing all of the second income".<sup>(29)</sup>

Mr. Hamer did not say how he knew those families would be happy to reduce their incomes in the face of continued inflation.

His solution is to increase the proportion of part-time jobs in the Victorian Public Service from 2.7 per cent to 10 per cent. Unless current staff ceilings are lifted, that means a reduction in full-time jobs.

It is easy to see why employers use part-time and casual labour. As Concetta Bann, Associate Director of The Brotherhood of St. Laurence says, "They gain a more easily disposable workforce, a workforce more reliant on part-time work and therefore more committed and, as such workers are usually married women, a lessened potential for workplace militancy". (33)

Although a few women may benefit from obtaining a part-time job to augment their husbands' income, this can only be at the expense of women generally.

Firstly, they are so anxious to prove themselves that they work flat out during the hours they are employed, often skipping lunch hours so they can get home early. This puts a great strain on them and their families as they are endeavouring to do two jobs and to maintain standards in both.

Secondly, they are putting an even greater strain on women who need a full-time wage. The latter are expected to maintain the same rate of production over a full eight hours and then go home to do the housework in the evenings. They work under the constant threat of losing their jobs to part-timers because they cannot maintain the same speed and concentration over the longer period. The result is an overall reduction in the hours of work available and a lower rate per hour for the work actually performed.

Thirdly, they see themselves as wives and mothers rather than workers and therefore tend not to join or identify with the union movement, thus undermining the effectiveness of unions in protecting the welfare of workers.

Fourthly, their willingness and ability to forego paid work so that they can be home when their children are not at school reduces the pressure on government to provide community child care facilities for those who cannot afford the same luxury.

In the long term the most damaging effect of the increasing amount of part-time work performed by women is the reinforcement of the notion that women do not need as much income as men and that they should be prepared to forfeit paid work so that they can continue to do unpaid work in their homes and for the community.



In times of full employment part-time work may be a means of attracting extra labour. In the present economic climate it is almost certainly a means of reducing employment and minimizing the effectiveness of unions by the development of a fragmented shifting subculture of unionized casual workers who do not know their rights and have no means of enforcing them.

Nevertheless, whether they like it or not, 1,012,400 Australians (16% of all employed persons) are now employed on a part-time or casual basis. They badly need the protection of the union movement. Ways and means of dealing with this situation will be discussed in NEW PERSPECTIVES ON PART-TIME WORK, Part II.

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