



WORKPLACE CHANGE AND AWARD RESTRUCTURING

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Abstract

This thesis examines aspects of paid work in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By the later 1980s a version of post-Fordist theory, which I call 'optimistic', influenced Australian policy makers, especially in the Australian Labor Party, several unions and the ACTU. The Australian proponents of 'optimistic' post-Fordism argued that new technologies and changing market conditions demanded more skilled, independent and flexible workers with more democratic workplace industrial relations than had been customary. This view of changing work demands is the central proposition tested in this study, examined firstly in a general way, by looking at Australian industrial relations from the late 1980s into the early 1990s, and secondly, more specifically, in two case studies.

'Optimistic post-Fordist' theory has several flaws, such as hypothesising an evolutionary development of production methods, understating the variety in work methods and not adequately addressing the growth in 'marginal' jobs. In addition, 'optimistic post-Fordism' is equivocal about whether its post-Fordist vision will or will not be achieved. At some points technology is posited as the primary factor impelling changes to work, while at others social and political forces are instrumental. Nonetheless, work has been subject to growing pressures to change. From the mid 1980s, Australia's industrial relations system felt, and responded to, these pressures. Workplace and enterprise focus increased. Award restructuring became central in the late 1980s, but different parties had competing aims. The central concern of this thesis is how work changed during award restructuring, and did these changes correspond with an 'optimistic post-Fordist' view of industrial change.

The case studies are of award restructuring in the Adelaide Branch Office of the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and the timber industry. In the ATO, employees gained increased career opportunities and greater participation in shaping work organisation. However, job redesign meant task expansion and increased work intensity. Supervisory practice became less domineering, but effectively some keyboard data entry was 'displaced' to the private sector, where work would be less regulated. Timber industry employers preferred limited union involvement in workplaces, implementing quality and participation schemes that avoided unions, while the union sought formalised consultation processes. The union's 'post-Fordist' objective of a more skilled workforce met employers' more limited aims of enterprise specific worker competencies and cost minimising. Worker input into improving production efficiency increased, suggesting relaxation of Taylorist/Fordist hierarchical production organisation, although management continued striving for maximum productivity and tension continued between consent and control in management-

employee relations.

In both cases, significant, although different work changes accompanied award restructuring. In the ATO there was more notable job redesign than in the timber industry. Industrial relations became more co-operative in both areas, although in the timber industry it appeared that post-Fordism, as pictured by Australian labour movement leaders, was not a strong influence on management. Higher union density in the ATO than in the timber industry, and more ATO management support for job redesign (and other initiatives) that reduced low level jobs, influenced the different outcomes in the case studies. Changes in the ATO during award restructuring benefited low classification women workers, suggesting modification of the critique of award restructuring that it was, and is, relevant for male manufacturing workers and less pertinent for women employees in service industries. However, the ATO has very different characteristics to other service employment areas, likely making it somewhat exceptional.

Statement

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and that, to the best of the candidate's knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis being made available for photocopying and loan if accepted for the award of the degree.

Signed

Date

20.4.98

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Abbreviations

ABARE	Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACAC	Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission
ACF	Australian Conservation Foundation
ACOA	Administrative and Clerical Officers' Association (formed the PSU)
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AIRC	Australian Industrial Relations Commission
ANM	Australian Newsprint Mills
APPM	Associated Pulp and Paper Mills
APS	Australian Public Service
APSA	Australian Public Service Association
ASC	Australian Securities Commission
ASO	Administrative Service Officer
ATO	Australian Taxation Office
ATWU	Australian Timber Worker Union, (became Australian Timber and Allied Industries Union (ATAIU) in 1991)
AWIRS	The Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey
BCA	Business Council of Australia
CAI	Confederation of Australian Industry (now Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry ACCI)
ECC	Enterprise Consultative Committee
ELS	Electronic Lodgement Service
FAFPIC	Forestry and Forest Product Industry Council
FCU(TOB)	Federated Clerks Union (Tax Officers Branch) (joined the PSU, 1990)
FTIA	Federation of Timber Industrial Associations
JIT	Just In Time
NAFI	National Association of Forest Industries
OSI	Office Structures Implementation
PSB	Public Service Board (disbanded 1987)
PSC	Public Service Commission (created 1987)
PSU	Australian Public Sector and Broadcasting Union
RAC	Resource Assessment Commission
RDO	Rostered Day Off
RSI	Repetitive Strain Injury
SEP	Structural Efficiency Principle
TQM	Total Quality Management
TTIA	Timber Trade Industrial Association