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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Without all of the above (and others), this work would not have been possible. The author remains responsible for the final product.

List of Tables and Figures

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

Chapter One: Introduction

In recent times employment and industrial relations issues have been in the forefront of public concern as well as of academic inquiry. These concerns have affected Australia at least as much as many other countries, possibly more, because of its somewhat unique, 'quasi-legal', institutionalised industrial relations system. This study focuses on industrial relations and workplace production organisation in late 1980s and early 1990s Australia. In brief, it looks at an optimistic post-Fordist theory, influential in the late 1980s in the Australian labour movement, which underpinned many unions' approaches to award restructuring (a central feature of Australian industrial relations in this period). According to this view, work was being 'upskilled', workers made more autonomous (at work), industrial relations more co-operative and workplaces more democratic (Mathews 1989a). These production organisation developments reputedly challenged the Taylorist/Fordist mass production hegemony with more flexible production. The case studies below look at work and industrial relations change in two areas of employment in late 1980s and early 1990s Australia: investigating the effects of award restructuring and seeking to identify the significance of post-Fordism.

After outlining the structure of the thesis, this introduction discusses the broad context for the study and the methods used in its conduct. The next chapter, Chapter Two, discusses major sources of Australian optimistic post-Fordism, suggesting difficulties with that perspective and issues for the research. Chapter Three looks at changes in Australian industrial relations in the later 1980s, identifying major approaches to industrial relations and employment, and investigating the significance of the influence of post-Fordist notions in these areas. These two chapters address debates influencing Australian industrial relations and its analysis from the 1980s, raising issues for the empirical research in two employment areas which form the following two chapters (Chapters Four and Five): one of a public sector, clerical work setting with many women workers; the other of manufacturing workplaces (using timber) in the private sector with a majority of male employees. The main argument supported through the thesis is that notions of an unvarying link between asserted stages of economic or industrial development and particular types of labour process are difficult to sustain (Bray and Littler 1988: 557). An important subsidiary point arising from the research is that through the late 1980s and early 1990s it was possible to achieve significant changes to work and industrial relations within Australia's

centralised industrial relations system, contrary to the claims of that system's constraining rigidity (Drago et al. 1992), although some employers were not satisfied with the extent of change achievable within the system.

1.1 The Study's Background

At the outset it should be noted that a limitation of this study is that it addresses paid work without considering its important interconnections with unpaid labour, not because unpaid work is unimportant or does not affect employment, but to keep the study within manageable proportions, given that the study focus is 'optimistic' post-Fordism. The study concentrates on the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the centrality of the economy and industrial relations to public policy debates intensified, workplace performance was subject to closer scrutiny and claims that existing working arrangements needed changing received greater publicity and wide acceptance in Australia (Curtain 1990, Zappala 1988). Award restructuring was central to Australian industrial relations at this time (Curtain and Mathews: 1990). The world economy was changing significantly, with major possible implications for work and industrial relations in Australia. However, among writers on economic and industrial relations, views differed about public policy and enterprise responses. This thesis considers various interpretations, and reflects on what the case studies suggest about the nature of industrial relations and workplace change in Australia.

One view is that Australia's 'quasi-legal' industrial relations institutions adopted award restructuring to address the perceived outdatedness of existing work regulation arrangements so that equity would be protected while efficiency was also promoted (Zappala 1988). In this view, contemporary (and more flexible) work organisation was hampered by work regulation arrangements established early this century that went with a rigid demarcation of work tasks. Some have seen award restructuring as part of a strategy aimed at averting radical 'deregulation' by encouraging workplace change based on developing, with unions, more skilled and efficient workers rather than cutting working conditions. For others this approach was a wrong-headed attempt to facilitate post-Fordist workplaces in an effort to promote socialism (Costa and Duffy 1991). A quite different perspective about desirable workplace change was forcefully put by employer groups through the 1980s (representing some of Australia's largest companies, but also small employers, miners and farmers - that is, non-manufacturing areas), advocating 'deregulation' of Australia's centralised industrial relations practice to increase the enterprise focus of industrial relations.[1]

Curtain and Mathews (1990)[2] offered a positive estimation of award

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[1]   Such 'deregulation' was (and is), however, really about a particular form of 'regulation', one with less protection for employees (Broomhill and Spoehr 1995).

[2]   Piece originally published in 1990; I have also used a 1992 re-publication of the piece (see

restructuring, suggesting that a productivity enhancing approach to workplace change was emerging in late 1980s Australia: an approach using higher skilled and more flexible working rather than focussing on lower labour costs. This was an alternative to "the form of unregulated flexibility developed at the enterprise level in the UK and USA (Mathews 1989b)" (Curtain and Mathews 1992: 447). However, it was not a foregone conclusion that Australian firms would adopt the high-skill approach. Cost minimisation was attractive to at least some employers. Curtain and Mathews predicted that a comprehensive productivity enhancing approach to award restructuring would most likely apply in the trade exposed sectors of the economy. They estimated that maybe ten per cent of Australian firms would use such approaches (1992: 447), with half of award covered workplaces pursuing minimal award and workplace change (Curtain and Mathews 1992: 442).

This bifurcated heuristic device, of 'cost minimisation' versus 'productivity enhancement' approaches to award restructuring, provides various dimensions for exploring industrial relations and workplace change in late 1980s Australia, centring around skill formation, work organisation and workplace industrial relations. The central questions in this study include whether work skills were increasing, was work becoming more autonomous and were workplace industrial relations becoming more democratic? The cases in this study add empirical knowledge of the implementation of award restructuring, contributing to an understanding of why particular outcomes result in specific instances. The focus on award restructuring's implementation also enables reflection on the view, advocated especially by the Business Council of Australia (BCA) from later in the 1980s, that Australia's industrial relations system inhibits enterprise specific work arrangements supposedly necessary in contemporary market conditions.[3] In brief, these case studies suggest that it is possible within Australia's industrial relations system to implement work and industrial relations changes, although such changes may not meet all the industrial relations participants' aims.

My interest in the topic was partly stimulated by my experience of working in furniture manufacture and timber machining as award restructuring became central in Australian industrial relations. For many in Australian unions, award restructuring offered the potential to significantly change work regulation to improve workers' jobs and career opportunities. Many unionists believed award restructuring could 'fit' with modern technological and economic changes that demanded increased worker skills and more employee participation in shaping production processes and work

Bibliography).
[3]   As cited by, for example, Russell Lansbury (1990: 23). Dabscheck argues that the BCA's real objective is to undermine workers' independent collective organisations, unions, with its stated aim being single union bargaining units in workplaces, but its ultimate aim being non-union worksites (1990: 12).

organisation.

The question of work skills remains a vexed one. Twenty years ago Braverman (1974) (re-)ignited interest in modern industrialisation's effects on worker skills, hypothesising that deskilling was the primary trend of twentieth century employment. Feminist writers argue that Braverman's thesis fails to incorporate the "complexity of reality" which is central in existing work (Wajcman 1991a: 29).[4] Discussions of work skills should, at least, be aware of two opposite 'ideal-type' interpretative positions. Firstly, there is a 'technicist' view that production technology determines a job's tasks and, thus, the skills required (Shields 1995). Opposing this is the view that social processes, infused with power relations, determine recognition of work skills. Wajcman cautions against following this logic (as some feminists do) to argue that gender work inequality results only from ideological constructions of work skills, because gender inequality is also related to "real material aspects of skill" (Wajcman 1991a: 38). Women employees have been disadvantaged as their access to workplace technologies and associated work capabilities has been limited. A similar theoretical sensitivity that various factors influence work skills determination is found in approaches that distinguish between 'strong' and 'weak' views of the social construction of skill (Shields 1995: 2-3). In the 'strong' version (similar to feminist views that Wajcman cautions against), workplace politics determines skill levels irrespective of a job's technical content, while the 'weak' position sees a "dialectical and historical relationship" between "objective skill and skilled status and, more generally, technology and the social division of labour" (Shields 1995: 3).[5]

Optimistic post-Fordism is among theories postulating that modern production requires greater worker skills. The empirical research for this thesis looks at changes to work during award restructuring in two cases. The key questions pursued in the case studies include: were increasing work skills apparent, were more mentally rewarding jobs created by award restructuring, and were more democratic industrial relations developing? A significant part of this research, often overlooked in studies of changes to employment, examined employee perceptions of changes to work skills that occurred during award restructuring. Overall, the optimistic post-Fordist proposition that more skilled and autonomous workers are 'required' by contemporary economic and technological changes is tested in the two cases.

Optimistic post-Fordist views are seen by many as following Piore and Sabel's influential 1984 work that hypothesised 'flexible specialisation' (Thompson 1989, Smith 1992a). One important criticism of views that higher skilled jobs are developing

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4   Just one dimension of this is that single occupations (such as clerk) can encompass a broad range of working conditions.

5   Willis (1988: 13) refers to Littler's three way classification of skill, on the basis of 'objective' dimensions of a job in its specific knowledge and ability requirements, the extent of job autonomy; and the status accorded the job by society. Shields provides some useful pointers, noting that the "hallmarks of objective skill" are "manual dexterity, task versatility and job discretion" (1995: 22).

is that jobs which are recognised as higher skilled primarily occur in male-dominated occupations, while women and migrants remain 'stuck' in semi-skilled and less well rewarded jobs that miss the benefits of technological change. Manufacturing provides a clear instance of this, where women are "concentrated in work which does not require a wide level of task mastery but, rather, extraordinary proficiency in the doing of one, or a small number of, tasks" (Bennett 1992: 424). It could be argued that such work deserves higher pay as it requires more skill, self-sacrifice and self-control than men's work, which usually has greater variety and autonomy.[6] A criticism of post-Fordist theories, and, in the Australian context, union approaches to award restructuring, is that they have been based on male workers in manufacturing. The scope of this study's research did not enable a thorough exploration of the social processes determining work skills, but this pair of case studies enables some consideration of whether recent changes in work and industrial relations advantage men and not women, and whether manufacturing benefited more from award restructuring and associated work change than other areas of the economy, particularly service sectors. However, the service area in the empirical part of this study is in the public sector, generally recognised as being more 'humane' to workers than the private sector, although this changed in the 1980s as politicians reversed public sector growth.

For Curtain and Mathews (1992), contemporary management faces a choice between essentially two opposing strategies: one of increasing worker skills and another concentrating on cost minimisation. As noted above, Mathews does not assert that post-Fordist award restructuring will characterise every sector of the economy, and he recognises instances of intensification of classic 'Fordist' methods (probably in particular sectors) (Williams 1992: 40). Other critical supporters (Neilson and Harris 1996) of Mathews' project - advocating post-Fordism to convince businesses and unions that high-skill workers will achieve superior productivity - argue that 'orthodox Marxist' critiques mis-represent Mathews, especially in arguing that his thesis is based on technological determinism.[7] Neilson and Harris contend that Mathews' emphasis on the role of politics in shaping work organisation is not technologically determinist, but they believe he uses a form of economic determinism by arguing that in industrialised countries organisations need highly skilled and committed workers (1996: 133). Overall "Mathews seems to suggest ... this is the only viable one [model] eventually" (1996: 129). However, rather than seeing one dominant 'technology paradigm', Neilson and Harris argue that various uses of technology occur, such

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[6]   It might reasonably be argued that all jobs require skill (Ryan, Foreword in Game and Pringle 1983: 8), and that the large pay differential, commonly favouring more intellectually stimulating, autonomous and varied jobs (more often men's than women's) is an unjust consequence of the gendered labour market.

[7]   They argue that the underlying reason for this criticism is a distaste for Mathews' promotion of greater co-operation between management and labour.

variety showing the "inconsistencies and contradictions of the different historical forms of capitalism", and that there is an ongoing tension in the workplace between direct control and responsible autonomy (1996: 132). The thesis case studies contribute to our understanding of whether work in two particular areas of employment was becoming more skilled and more autonomous in the period of award restructuring.

1.2 Study Methodology

Several theoretical and methodological approaches are possible for studying industrial relations. Such research can be pluralist by not being restricted to a single theoretical framework or perspective (Kelly 1991a, Gardner 1991). Industrial relations as academic study is "an eclectic subject, and although there may be a tendency to prefer some methods over others, notably case studies, research covers the whole range of social science techniques" (Gardner 1991: 29). Gardner (1991) suggests that Australian industrial relations study has been dominated by qualitative case studies in comparison to the characteristic quantitative academic studies of industrial relations in the United States. While this methodological difference is supported by looking at US and Australian industrial relations' journals (implying different orientations to methodology and, more generally, legitimate research strategies that contribute to social knowledge and theory), the distinction between quantitative and qualitative is sometimes too strongly emphasised and too simply put. Adherence to one 'canon's' strictures can result in limited insight from research effort. Contrary to the proposition that a study demonstrates its validity mostly by whether it keeps to a particular methodological approach or not, it is quite productive to use both qualitative and quantitative methods. The critical point is for the research to be primarily directed by the project's questions (Gardner 1991).

Interestingly, contrasting with suggestions that Australian industrial relations research has commonly used case studies, others believe industrial relations research has tended to neglect individual workplaces. Drago, Wooden, and Sloan (1992: 1) say this results from the centralised industrial relations system and the associated presumption that conflict was removed from the workplace to be settled in, and by, industrial commissions.[8] Lansbury and Macdonald (1992: 2) agree "the focus of industrial relations research in this country has been upon the structures and processes that exist beyond the workplace". They argue that the recent increased interest in

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[8]   In this view, continued conflict in workplaces is attributed to the fact that "people remained in the workplace" (Drago, Wooden, and Sloan 1992: 1). This somewhat casual statement is not explored as the authors get on with their much more important task of delving into the asserted determinants of workplace productivity. Conflict in the workplace is important to the extent that it affects work effort and thus productivity. Conflict in the workplace is normal. A reviewer of Mathews' *Tools of Change*, points out that awards can be seen as truces between employers and unions, but "the overwhelming experience of shop stewards and union organisers is one of constant struggle to preserve and implement the terms of their award" (Sutherland 1989: 45).

workplace industrial relations coincided with a major publicity drive by the 'New Right' against "restrictive work practices" (Lansbury and Macdonald 1992: 2). The empirical workplace research in this study, investigating this important issue of the nature of contemporary work change, was influenced by this interest, focussing on workplace level industrial relations.

It is commonly believed that quantitative research methods are particularly useful for making broad generalisations while case studies are relevant to detailed knowledge of specific instances (Gardner 1991: 32). Others argue, however, that there is no inherent reason why case study methodology cannot develop knowledge of broader theoretical significance, believing that the limited quantitative basis of case study approaches is a less substantial limitation than often perceived. Qualitative methods, such as case studies, can give rise to general statements (Yin 1984). Yin identifies several types of case study, and at one point distinguishes three main elements of case studies: they investigate a "contemporary phenomenon within its real life context"; secondly, the boundaries between the object of the study and its context are not clearly demarcated and, thirdly, various sources of information are used, indicating that case studies may not rely only on interviews and/or observation, but also use other information sources, such as relevant documentary material (Yin 1984: 23). The second aspect, partly following from the first, points to the complexity of the case study in that it is part of wider phenomena which the researcher is unable to control, but for which some allowance must be made (Mitchell: 1983: 192). Mitchell also notes several categories of case study, showing variation in levels of complexity and conscious intention, from largely descriptive and not explicitly theoretical, to the carefully planned study aimed at testing a specific theoretical proposition. In general, the case study aims "to accurately portray the facts of the case; consider alternative explanations for those facts; and conclude with an explanation that best fits the facts" (Yin, 1981: 61 quoted in Rosser, 1991: 7).

Mitchell argues that theorisation on the basis of case study material is built on "the validity of the analysis rather than the representativeness of the events"; and that inferences made from statistical, quantitative research are different from those made on the basis of case study material (1983: 190, 188). Criticising a case study on the grounds that it is not representative (of events and/or relations in its field) misconstrues the evaluation of various research approaches, and case studies in particular, which interrogate a 'general theoretical principle'. Mitchell is critical of the common assumption that "the only valid basis of inference is that which has been developed in relation to statistical analysis" (Mitchell 1983: 197). He argues that researchers using quantitative strategies inevitably use *both* logical and statistical inferences in their theories and do not, contrary to widely held presumption (even by researchers themselves), only rely on statistical inference. In this view, case studies

can only be based on logical inference and it is the veracity of the analysis which influences the extent to which suggestions from a case study may be applied more generally (Mitchell 1983: 200).

Gardner is more influenced than Mitchell (a social anthropologist) by the orthodox US social science view that case studies are limited by the difficulty of generalising from a small quantitative base, although she recognises that 'critical' and 'revelatory' case studies can be designed to produce insights not accessible quantitatively (1991: 34). Mitchell differs, arguing that quantitative research abstracts by generalising, whereas qualitative research generalises by abstracting - they both abstract and generalise but in different ways (1983: 201). For Yin, case studies "rely on *analytical* generalization" while quantitative research "relies on *statistical* generalization" (1984: 39, original emphases). The critical matter for analysis is that it be based on appropriate and accurate theorisation and problematisation.

Another claimed limitation of case studies is the potential for unbalanced interpretation of the data collected (Gardner 1991: 34). Sutcliffe (1991) cautions that qualitative studies, such as visiting workplaces and interviewing 'participants', can assist industrial relations analysis but much care is needed to avoid possible biases - especially the subjectivity of the research 'subjects', but also of the researcher. He suggests, however, that seeking 'participant' views, following Weber's sociology, is critical for more complete understandings of social phenomena by incorporating people's self-understanding. Some researchers follow this to the 'extreme', focussing only on research subjects' articulated perceptions and rejecting externally imposed categories on the subject of study (Sutcliffe 1991: 82). Those especially influenced by this approach have been dissatisfied with 'objectivist' or 'positivist' social science that believes in the acquisition and gradual building up of knowledge by following a strict method (Sutcliffe 1991: 83). Others use several methods, believing an incomplete interpretation results from only considering subjects' views and not the constraining environment in which those views arise.

1.3 Study Outline

I adopt the latter course by using a range of information sources in a case study approach to investigate whether work is becoming more skilled and rewarding, workplaces more democratic and industrial relations more consultative in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I begin by discussing optimistic post-Fordist theory, showing several of its origins, and suggesting a tension in its overall vision of a technological/economic imperative impelling more skilled and creative workers, but also arguing that workplace change is determined socially and politically. The following chapter situates this debate about modern economic change in the context of late 1980s Australian industrial relations, especially award restructuring. It suggests

varied responses to award restructuring, but, overall, an increased capacity for employers, in particular, to modify work regulation within the centralised industrial relations system, although not necessarily meeting all the demands of employers. Many unions sought 'productivity enhancement' while employer approaches were more varied, raising questions about the veracity of the optimistic post-Fordist view that contemporary economic and technological conditions privilege high-skill approaches to workplace change (although it should be recognised that Mathews, for example, concedes that post-Fordist methods will not be adopted uniformly).

The case studies considered the implementation of award restructuring in two instances. The first case study was of white-collar office work in a large organisation in the public sector, with about half the employees women. This is of interest in light of critiques that award restructuring was designed to benefit male workers in manufacturing and would be inappropriate for application to female employees. The other case study was of a manufacturing industry sub-sector, with a range of workplaces and enterprises, and more male employees proportionately, apparently having more in common with the metal industry, from which the unions' 'high-skill' approach to award restructuring (and industrial change more generally) has often been seen as originating (Deery and Plowman 1991). The case studies had the potential to be germane and potentially useful for testing notions about award restructuring's implementation and the tenor of modern work change, especially the extent to which the optimistic post-Fordist vision of work change is evident (albeit within the limited time period of the research, late 1980s to 1993).

A range of information sources were used in the case studies, including participant interviews with open-ended questions, permitting scope for interviewees to expand on their views of events and policies. With the participants' agreement, these were taped and transcribed (providing some of the empirical data-base for the research). To gain a balance of views, a range of individuals were interviewed in each case: workplace employees, and various level union and management representatives (including employer organisation spokespeople). The same research interview instruments were applied in each case study, although there were differences between those used with managers and workers, and there was scope to address particular aspects of the individual cases. All interviews addressed the central issues of work organisation, award restructuring implementation and workplace change. Documents from unions, employers and their organisations, and industrial commissions were utilised. (More detail of the specific sources of information used in each case is given in each of the case study chapters.)

The theoretical discussion suggests that changes to work are more complex and variable than propositions of a post-Fordist transformation suggest. The case studies do not support views that work organisation based on more skilled workers

was being established universally or that Australia's industrial relations system prevented workplace change. The cases extend understanding of the nature of particular work processes and how and why they have changed. From the limited time-span and cases in the research, it would be injudicious to generalise about how all employment types changed during award restructuring.

PART ONE: THEORY AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CHANGE

Chapter Two: Post-Fordist Theory in Australia

2.1 Introduction

A central concern in debates about contemporary economic change is the nature of changes to employment. 'Post-Fordism' is an influential concept used in these debates but, contrary to some people's impression, argues Amin (1994a), 'post-Fordism' is not a single, unified theory. Different forms of 'post-Fordism' have various focusses, from epoch changing political, economic and social development to a more limited concern with production and work organisation. Through the 1980s, Australian public policy makers concerned about the economy were influenced by an optimistic version of post-Fordist theory (noted by, for example, Bamber, Boreham and Harley 1992, Campbell 1990). Other influences were also important, particularly deregulatory economics popularised as 'economic rationalism'.[1]

This chapter's objective is to identify and discuss the 'optimistic post-Fordism' that gained Australian adherents during the 1980s. While not attempting a detailed evaluation of the theoretical frameworks informing post-Fordist views, the chapter discusses some of these major theories and offers some criticisms, illuminating important elements of Australian post-Fordism. The focus is on work organisation and industrial relations, as this study addresses aspects of these over the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Central to optimistic post-Fordism is the notion that contemporary economic change displaces rigid Taylorist work organisation with a more flexible and specialised organisation of production that requires more skilled workers and co-operative industrial relations, most vitally at the workplace (Mathews 1989a). Interestingly, this theory largely accepts Braverman's (1974) influential, though much criticised, deskilling thesis that through this century, industrial capitalism increasingly segmented jobs. For optimistic post-Fordists, however, contemporary technology and market changes force major modification of employment.[2]

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[1] Elsewhere called, possibly more aptly, economic fundamentalism (Langmore and Quiggin 1994, Chapter 4).

[2] Interestingly, Braverman recognised the potential of new technologies to re-unify the labour process as they "eliminated many steps that had previously been assigned to detail workers" (Braverman 1974: 328). Capitalism, however, maintains the hierarchical division of labour it created, resisting such potential.

This chapter addresses the theoretical background of optimistic post-Fordist theory, and the next chapter looks at the applicability of this theory to Australian industrial relations from the mid 1980s. This chapter overviews major theoretical frameworks influencing post-Fordist analyses and discusses Australian optimistic post-Fordism, its views of work organisation this century and recent work change trends, suggesting that there are significant gaps and shortcomings. I argue that it is both premature and simplistic to assume that all work is changing in the same ways in response to modern economic and technological change (as popularised post-Fordist accounts sometimes imply). Identifying problems with post-Fordist theory suggests some critical issues for further analysis of modern developments affecting work.

2.2 Varieties of Post-Fordism

Three major theoretical influences on post-Fordist theories are raised in this section to help identify the optimistic version of post-Fordist theory and its views of work organisation and industrial relations. This thesis addresses the post-Fordist theory as interpreted and applied by a group of Australians, especially Mathews (1989a) and Carmichael (1989), who had significant influence over developing union strategy. Following this are Australian post-Fordist views of what will follow Fordism.

2.2.1 Influences on Post-Fordism

Serious economic difficulties in capitalist economies developed in the 1970s, as evidenced particularly in rising (and intractable) rates of unemployment. Various forms of post-Fordist theory conceive that these difficulties indicate a crisis in Fordist economy and society. Three main theoretical approaches "lie at the heart of the post-Fordist debate" (Amin 1994a: 6): the 'regulation school', the flexible specialisation thesis and the neo-Schumpeterian approach. The three approaches adopt different views of the causes of contemporary economic trends and their implications for workers. Each strand influenced Australian views of modern economic change. Taking into consideration various models of modern economic change, the ascent of post-Fordism is an open question, contrary to the impression given by optimistic post-Fordist views of a linear transition from Fordism to post-Fordism (Amin 1994a). Some point to significant differences between Mathews and other 'post-Fordists', especially the French regulationists (Hampson 1991a). As well, the popular depiction of pervasive Fordist dominance and a sequence of industrial development stages is problematic, making the question of what will follow Fordism ill conceived (Wright 1993, 1995).

A neo-Schumpeterian[3] approach was elaborated by Freeman and Perez (and

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3   In recognition of the influence of the economist Schumpeter. In the 1930s he re-worked

colleagues), arguing that path-breaking, widely applicable technological innovations raise productivity and create economic and industrial development cycles (Amin 1994a). Economic booms eventuate as a technology spreads, waning as the technology 'saturates' the economy. The central concept is of techno-economic paradigms (Elam 1994), which Mathews uses in a "model of techno-organisational change" (1994: 85). With current technological and economic trends, maximum productivity increase will result from creating more adaptable work organisation, which, in turn, requires more highly skilled workers. Critics of techno-economic long wave theory note its theoretical concession that social institutions affect economic development, but argue technology is regarded by theorists, such as Freeman and Perez, as determining economic development, thereby suggesting technological determinism (Elam 1994).

Another approach is Piore and Sabel's (1984) flexible specialisation thesis, often seen as popularising the notion of post-Fordist work organisation (Smith 1992a: 220). In their view contemporary society is at a fundamental turning point. Mass markets are saturated and breaking up, stimulating transformation of the economy and work (Elam 1994: 54). Mass production based on low-skilled workers dominated this century, although a craft model utilising more broadly skilled workers continued in isolated sectors. Recently, more specialised markets demand greater production flexibility, conditions which favour craft workers (Wright 1995: 163-4).

Mathews' post-Fordism is seen as based on Piore and Sabel's theory of mass production's demise (Hampson 1991a: 103). Hampson (1991a: 96ff.) identifies three related critiques of that theory. Firstly, Piore and Sabel's craft and mass production models are too abstract and ill-defined to indicate when one model dominates at the various levels of firm, industry, region or country. The dualist characterisation is too simple to account for historical and contemporary variety. Finally, Hampson argues (1991a: 108) that the possibility of a choice for business is pre-empted by their view that changing product markets favour more flexible, specialised production, and hence more skilled workers. While Piore and Sabel explicitly emphasise that production model choices are determined by social and political processes, their argument privileges economic forces (especially market power), thereby recalling Adam Smith's view (Elam 1994). Central to their view is the notion that the product market limits labour division and determines production organisation, offering little choice over production model.

The third major influence on post-Fordism is the French 'regulation school', dating from the late 1960s, that addresses capitalist development. Simplifying the work within this 'school', the key concept of 'regulation' focusses on capitalism's avoidance and survival of crises. It encompasses social institutions, structures and

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Kondratiev's, an economist, 1920s hypothesis that capitalist economic history followed fifty-year cycles of boom and bust.

relations that restrain capitalism's crisis tendencies (Hampson 1991a: 116).[4] According to regulation theorists, capitalist dynamism is related to the economy's 'regime of accumulation', which divides product between consumption and investment.[5] The 'mode of regulation' refers to the employment relations and state action that achieves co-ordination of economic activities. The 'mode of development' consists of the regime of accumulation and mode of regulation. Regulationists argue that capitalist societies have an investment 'practice' with which is associated a form of social and political regulation (Harvey 1990: 121). They aim to account for the end of the post-War 'long boom' but disagree over the causes of the Fordist crisis and its consequences for business and workers (Hampson 1991a).[6]

Some emphasise the differences between regulation theory and post-Fordist theories (Hampson 1991a). Contrary to the view that regulation theorists propose 'post-Fordist' schema, Hampson argues that the term hardly appears in their work and when it does it is a vague reference to whatever will follow Fordism (1991a: 120). Regulationists might then not be regarded as post-Fordists in the sense of predicting specific future economic and social development. Their concern with co-ordination of the political economy differs from optimistic post-Fordists, who focus on work organisation.

A common focus in recent debates of economic change (and its effects on workers) is flexibility.[7] Many believe greater business flexibility is necessary and achievable, primarily by altering labour use. Bamber *et al.* (1992: 2) identify two views: neo-managerialism and post-Fordism which concur that recent economic conditions require greater labour flexibility, but disagree over the specific labour flexibility 'required' and how to attain it. Atkinson's neo-managerialism sees firms using a segmented workforce, maximising access to various forms of labour flexibility by using different workers for particular jobs. Non-permanent employment relations are a high priority. Bamber *et al.* follow Atkinson, distinguishing three forms of labour flexibility: by number, function and pay.[8] Australian post-Fordists emphasise the functional dimension of labour flexibility, arguing that business needs more committed workers capable of wider task competency as competition is increasingly

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[4]   For an analysis of the 'regulation school', including identification of variants within the 'school', see B. Jessop (1990) "Regulation theories in retrospect and prospect", *Economy and Society*, vol. 19, no. 2.

[5]   This terminology indicates the Marxian influence on the regulation school.

[6]   Among the causes of the economic crisis are market saturation, productivity problems, tertiary sector growth, unproductive labour growth, increasing economic internationalisation and the wane of American power (Hampson 1991a: 119). Boyer (1988: 76-7) distinguishes between ordinary business cycle crises, that do not undermine the mode of development, and structural crises that create serious disparity between institutional forms and economic mechanisms, demanding stronger policies and strategies.

[7]   A much contested term in its application to employment, especially in recent times: see, for instance, Campbell 1993.

[8]   There are several approaches to classifying forms of flexibility. This three way distinction is common and captures important elements.

over speed of response to changing market tastes. Optimistic post-Fordists argue that functional versatility is the flexibility demanded by 'core' industrial sectors (such as motor vehicle and chemical production) (Mathews 1989a: 35) and that both productivity improvement for employers and more rewarding jobs for workers ensue. Having briefly summarised major influences on post-Fordist theory, the next section discusses the version influential in Australia in the 1980s.

2.2.2 Post-Fordism in Australia

An optimistic version of post-Fordist theory gained sway in 1980s Australia among some unions, sections of the Labor Party, some bureaucrats, employers and employer groups (Bamber *et al.* 1992). The post-Fordist debate is significant to late 1980s industrial relations developments in Australia with the labour movement's approach to award restructuring, and, more generally, to work regulation change influenced by optimistic post-Fordism (Campbell 1990, Harley 1994) (discussed in the next chapter). John Mathews' work (1989a) and the metal workers' union[9] were central to union views of award restructuring, including the ACTU's strategy underpinned by post-Fordist theory as interpreted by Mathews and others, especially former metal union officials, Laurie Carmichael (1989) and Max Ogden (1993). Positive possibilities for workers and unions in recent economic and social changes were claimed, contrary to a view that "[m]any, probably most, post-Fordist writers would see increased managerial control as a necessity for post-Fordist productive practices" (Hampson 1991b: 91, footnote 2). This is one of the main differences between Australian post-Fordism and French regulation theory, although Mathews suggests common ground by using Regulation concepts and language (Hampson 1991a: 93). Hampson also argues that Mathews is more technologically determinist than the French regulationists (in that Mathews is more expectant of a post-Fordist transformation), although Mathews is quite strong in rejecting such views (1989a: 2-3). This sits uneasily with his insistence that a social and political process determines work organisation. On the other hand, Australian post-Fordists have been praised for recognising that labour processes are crucial for analysing society, as paid work is central in people's lives (Campbell 1990).

Mathews' view of the Fordist crisis follows Piore and Sabel. The "1970s saw the end of the heyday of the Fordist elements: stable growing markets for mass-produced, standardised goods" (Mathews 1989a: 30). Mass markets in advanced Fordist countries became saturated, as there are "only so many cars, TV sets, washing machines or radios that people can absorb" (Mathews 1989a: 30). Industrialised

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9   The Australian Metal Workers' Union (AMWU) for much of the 1980s. It has been through several amalgamations; in the early 1990s being the Metal and Engineering Workers Union (MEWU), and in February 1995 becoming the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (registered as the AFMEPKIU; United Trades and Labor Council of South Australia: 1996 Directory and Digest).

countries from the mid 1970s experienced major economic change, with economic competition intensifying. Markets demanded more specialised products and changing customer tastes required faster production changeover. More skilled and flexible workers were, and are, necessary. Australian post-Fordist optimists believed Fordist mass production could not accommodate changing markets or changing technology (Mathews 1989a). Fordism's demise would enable work to be made more interesting and rewarding than ever before. In this view, Fordism had developed in the USA by the 1920s, and dominated the industrialised world after World War Two (argued by French regulationists, such as Lipietz 1992, and by Mathews 1989a and Carmichael 1989).

This characterisation of production methods development is based on a somewhat unproblematic use of key terms, such as Taylorism and Fordism. These concepts, and their dominance, are subject to debate. Taylorism, also called 'scientific management', refers to a system of labour management developed by Frederick Taylor. Braverman's (1974) deskilling thesis rekindled interest in Taylorism, as Taylor's methods were argued to be the critical influence on twentieth century capitalist management. Although many criticised Braverman, the notion that Taylorism dominated management through this century is quite pervasive (Ogden 1993). Taylor believed management's 'worker problem' derived from continuing to rely on at least some skilled workers, able to exercise power in the production process. Managerial control was not total.[10] Taylor's solution was for management to use specialist production planners to specify, in detail, work practices, thereby increasing control over, and certainty about, work performance.

Later writers define Taylorism differently, from covering all work process rationalisation initiatives to indicating specific management methods, such as work measurement, time study and incentive pay schemes. Mathews identifies three main elements in Taylorism (Mathews 1989a: 23; resembling Braverman's labour process perspective): firstly, management organises production to minimise reliance on worker skills; secondly, a planning or layout department defines in detail employee work, separating work design and performance; and, thirdly, work operations are specified by work study engineers, who identify the most 'efficient' work organisation, taking control of workers' production knowledge. Wright also identifies three main Taylorist techniques: "methods study, work measurement, and wage incentive schemes" (1995: 72). This last element is stressed by Kelly (1982a: 24-5) but does not seem important in Mathews' account.

Conceptually, Fordism is more varied, ranging from a focus on work organisation to broader theories about political economy. For some, Fordism

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[10]   Uncertainty about work performance is fundamental to the employment relationship as it involves employers purchasing a worker's ability to work for a certain period rather than a precise 'quantity' of work.

embraces important principles in capitalist work organisation, while for others the concept fails to encapsulate the complexity, variety and contradictory nature of employment relations and work under capitalism (Mathews 1989a, K. Williams *et al.* 1992). Presumptions about the nature of work organisation should not be made on the basis of a society's 'level' of economic development. Further, different 'methods' of work organisation, or different management strategies, are not mutually exclusive, even within the same firm.[11]

Optimistic post-Fordists tend to adopt a lineal view of industrial development. Fordist mass production was built on Taylorist principles (Mathews 1989a: 89), established in the USA by the 1920s (Mathews 1989a: 27), spreading to other industrialised countries after World War Two. Mathews uses 'Fordism' to cover the "major features of the dominant industrial system, and what distinguishes it from the pre-[Second World] war regime of accumulation" (1989a: 28). It has three main features: mass production, the assembly line, and one form or other of scientific management (Mathews 1989a: 27). Pursuit of these initiatives realised a "breathtaking shift of power in favour of the employers, dispossessing workers of their skills and instituting a dictatorship in the workplace" (Mathews 1989a: 24). Gradually Fordism spread to other industries, not just because of technical superiority, but also because management gained more control over production and, therefore, costs. By controlling the assembly line's speed, management set work speed. For Mathews, Fordist production methods greatly increased productivity, leading to an overproduction crisis in the 1930s Great Depression (1989: 27), a view disputed by Brenner and Glick (1991, see below). Others agree that Fordism includes a "labor process involving moving assembly line mass production", but dispute Fordism's pervasiveness (Sayer and Walker 1992: 194).

Kelly (1982a: 24-5) emphasises that the Ford Motor Company (at its Highland Park mass assembly car plant in the second decade of this century) extended Taylorism's division of labour by incorporating labour control in the production machinery, effecting a technical regulation of workers. Kelly agrees that under Taylorism employee control was based on separating work planning and performance, but to this he adds strict supervisory authority and an incentive pay system to reward higher individual output.

Fordism is primarily used in this thesis to refer to production methods, work organisation and industrial relations. Mathews follows French 'regulation' writers in also using Fordism to imply a form of political economy. In this view the 1930s 'New Deal' in the USA was crucial to state policies supporting 'Fordism' that sustained the post-World War Two 'long boom', (the high point of Fordism) when unions in

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[11]   For example, Williams (Williams with Thorpe 1992, Chapter 2) argues that Human Relations management training can, and did in the case of open-cut coal mining in the 1970s, co-exist with Taylorist production organisation.

industrialised countries conceded productivity increases in return for wage rises (Williams with Thorpe 1992: 9). Workers gained from the "acceptance of mass trade unions and collective bargaining as legitimate elements of the economic order" (Williams with Thorpe 1992: 26). Mass consumer markets were created and the State's economic role grew, regulating employment relations. In industrialised countries the State is also thought to have been crucial to the greater integration of unions into corporate management and government structures.[12] However, a crisis of Fordism developed from the 1970s as international competition increased and mass markets became saturated.

2.2.3 Neo-Fordism and Post-Fordism

One variety of response to reaching the limits of Fordism has been called 'neo-Fordist' as mass production methods are intensified. Mathews identifies two main forms: intensifying Fordist methods, or greater innovation and specialisation within Fordist work organisation and industrial relations structures. Their potential to increase productivity is limited as they under-utilise modern technologies (1989a: 31-33). A third neo-Fordist response is to locate production in low wage Third World countries, but low wages limit consumer demand (Mathews 1989a: 32).[13] For Mathews a further, preferable alternative is post-Fordism, based on more innovative and specialised production that can rapidly adjust output (1989a: 31). In this schema, business in advanced nations needs to use new technologies to boost productivity because advanced economies cannot compete with Third World labour cost advantages (Mathews 1989a: 31-32).

It should also be noted that 'neo-Fordist' is used by some to refer to writers who disagree with the optimistic post-Fordist view of contemporary industrial and workplace change. Rather than hypothesising a trend to more rewarding work and more democratic workplaces, such 'neo-Fordist' views emphasise that contemporary changes to work, that supposedly enhance labour 'flexibility', do not transcend the fundamental structural antagonism between management and workers, or reverse Taylorist control strategies, but are likely to involve work intensification and essentially build on existing labour control practices (Harley 1994).

In the 'advanced' world, Mathews proposes that potential for closer co-operation between employers and workers arises from the most 'effective' application of new technologies to production. He rejects that this view is technologically

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[12]   Others question this view for Australia (Ewer, Higgins, Stephens 1987: 27). Sustaining Australian manufacturing growth during the long boom is attributed to private investment, stimulated by reconstruction where government protects domestic industries, rather than to state Keynesian policies.

[13]   This points to two aspects of wages: as a cost of production and as employees' income, which is used to buy products, thereby enabling business to sell its product and realise profit. Competition between producers puts pressure on production costs, including wages. Restraining wages can be a problem for sustaining demand.

determinist, an approach which he is strongly critical of as it holds, for instance, that a particular technology 'requires' a certain type of work organisation, or that work needs to be arranged hierarchically for efficiency (Mathews 1989: 2-3). The relation between society and technology is a complex theoretical issue. Arguably Mathews invokes a kind of technological determinism in contending that there is a best way, as measured by productivity, to organise work with new computer technologies (Hampson 1991a). Mathews suggests that industries using modern technologies need more skilled workers with greater responsibility and commitment (1988: 23).[14] He follows Piore and Sabel in postulating that current economic and technological conditions favour production organisation based on higher skilled workers than did Fordism.

However, according to many in the labour movement, Australian management is an obstacle to achieving this transformation, as it maintains Taylorist principles of work organisation (Carmichael 1989 is among those making this point).[15] Although Australian post-Fordists believe a stronger technological basis now exists for management and worker co-operation, Mathews writes of organisations using computerisation "in a way which *intensifies* control and further *deskills* the work of programmed [sic] system operators" (Mathews 1989a: 125; original emphasis). Mathews seems to recognise that management does not necessarily appreciate or desire the most 'productive' use of new technologies; that a post-Fordist approach is not inevitable, but if this path is not pursued managers will take "industry down the road to oblivion" (Mathews 1989a: 126). This view suggests little production organisation choice for business.

Greater appreciation of managerial choice is implied in the Australian post-Fordists' view that unions need a detailed, critical understanding of workplace change, of events affecting their members, and they need to appreciate, and maximise, the positive potential for workers of post-Fordist production methods (Ogden 1993, Mathews 1989a). Management, in this account, does not have total power over work regulation. Post-Fordist methods will not necessarily prevail. Social processes, such as negotiation and bargaining, shape work regulation. This corresponds to Littler and Quinlan's (1989: 191) view that Badham and Mathews (1989) argue that post-Fordist work organisation "depend[s] on workplace politics and, more broadly, on the politics of technological change".[16]

Positing alternative work organisation possibilities differs from holding that

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[14]   In this Mathews makes a similar argument to Zuboff (1988). She argues that business will benefit most from new information technologies where work organisation uses higher skilled employees who can utilise the increased information made available by new technologies, and use that information to improve production processes.

[15]   Critics of unions and Australia's award system (Drago, Wooden and Sloan 1992) make similar criticisms of unions: that they are wedded to existing awards and work organisation.

[16]   Employer and union approaches to technology influence the production system (Badham and Mathews 1989: 231).

economic and technological imperatives demand more democratic workplaces, as do neo-Schumpeterians. Badham and Mathews concede instances of work intensification, worker polarisation (between high and semi-skilled), and anti-union management (1989: 217). However, counter examples do not render post-Fordist theories wrong, as such evidence is disputable, does not invalidate post-Fordist trends and empirical data by itself does not decide the utility of 'macro-social theories', which, in any case, "must do some violence to local and particular phenomena" (Badham and Mathews 1989: 215). This view of industrial history contends that the transition from one production model to another takes time: the rise of Fordism took 50 years (Mathews 1989b: 70). New production forms initially arise in leading sectors, spreading over time (Mathews 1992b: 106-7; Ogden, 1993: 3, says 25 to 35 years). Various trends will be evident as the 'new' develops from the 'old', but, these theorists argue, it is possible to detect that a fundamentally different production organisation is emerging.

Ogden also makes a stronger claim than this for widespread work organisation change, arguing that "nearly all industries" are affected (Ogden 1993: 1-2) as "new, complex technologies which can enhance mass production at the same time lay the basis for a fundamental break with Taylorism" (1993: 2). He clearly distinguishes between Fordism and post-Fordism:

> Post-Fordism may be defined as the new forms of work organisation which break with the Division of Labor as systematised by Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford. The characteristics of post-Fordism are moved [sic] to work teams, with increasing skill, time for learning, ... and general self management" (Ogden 1993: 2).

Similarly Mathews argues that new technologies permit reintegration of work previously hierarchically divided by Taylorist principles (1989a: 125). Elsewhere he states, reflecting a neo-Schumpeterian influence, that "change and uncertainty within production represents a techno-economic loading of organizational choice towards greater worker skill and responsibility, and provides a political opportunity to improve workers' conditions and autonomy" (Badham and Mathews 1989: 200). Badham and Mathews say this is a paradigm shift, paradigm denoting "exemplary models of efficient production, which influence and condition production strategies" (1989: 209). In their production systems schema, paradigms are ideal types, distinct from, and informing, management strategies and labour control processes, which are applied and negotiated in workplaces.[17] Their model involves three variables: product innovation, process variability and labour responsibility, which together determine the production model (Badham and Mathews 1989: 207-208). Post-Fordist economic

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[17]   David Purdy uses the term paradigm in his typification of analytical approaches to the labour market (1988). For Purdy, paradigm "provides a guiding framework" (Purdy 1988: 3) that embodies the overarching logic of more detailed views that fit in a paradigm. There can be substantial controversies within a paradigm, but the paradigm is not open to empirical verification. He identifies two opposing paradigms: one of exchange and the other he calls the paradigm of reproduction (the minority view).

change is not only impelled by technology: Australian post-Fordists, like Ogden, Mathews and Carmichael, "have constantly said that various factors are driving the change, including new quality markets, new flexible technology, globalisation of the economy, higher levels of education, and lower direct labour costs" (Ogden 1993: 2).

This section has outlined major influences on post-Fordism, introducing the optimistic version of post-Fordist theory which gained support in Australia through the 1980s, indicating its main propositions, including that Fordist work organisation and industrial relations have passed their high point of relevance and that post-Fordist alternatives are developing. The next section further considers the notion of production model 'choice', arguing that Australian post-Fordists tend to be unclear about why, and how, post-Fordist production forms will develop as, on the one hand, they argue that post-Fordist forms will develop otherwise businesses will not prosper, but, on the other hand, stating that such forms depend on union intervention, thereby implying that a social and political process determines work organisation.

2.3 Criticisms of Post-Fordist Theory

Critiques of post-Fordist theory are now relatively numerous (Rustin 1989, Ewer *et al.* 1991, Harley 1994), having developed on a range of bases, including the post-Fordist view of industrial history, contemporary economic changes and their effects on work and industrial relations. This section discusses some of these criticisms, focussing particularly on the issues of work organisation, and work and industrial relations change, suggesting more historical variety in production forms than does Fordist theorisation of industrial development.

2.3.1 Problems with Fordist Theory

The historical accuracy of post-Fordist theories has been challenged on many points. While Fordist mass production may have characterised significant areas of production through this century, failure to recognise other forms of production organisation ignores the empirical evidence. Theories of post-Fordism built on Fordist political economy have been criticised for their functionalism (Rustin 1989), and for proposing historical breaks that fail to recognise the ongoing development of labour processes (Brenner and Glick 1991). Contrary to the view that the 1930s New Deal lifted economic demand to a full employment level, it is claimed that economic activity did not increase greatly until World War Two, and that military spending rather than high mass consumption largely sustained the post-war boom (Brenner and Glick 1991). In this view, theorists who utilise the notions of underconsumption and overproduction attribute too much import to workers' level of consumption in accounting for economic crisis. It is further argued that workers' real incomes gradually increased in the US from late last century, contrary to the view that in that

period stagnant workers' incomes could not sustain economic growth. Sayer and Walker (1992) argue that wages in mass production industries were, and are, insufficient to sustain demand for mass produced goods and that balancing production and consumption occurs across the whole economy, not just in individual sectors.

Fordist production organisation dominance is also queried (Sayer and Walker 1992). The Ford Motor Company did not entirely fit the Fordist mass production stereotype, finding, early this century, benefits from minimising stocks and continually improving production processes (Williams, Haslam and Williams 1992). The production process was under continual pressure to reduce labour. Workers moved between tasks, did not remain on one work operation and were encouraged to contribute ideas to improve production. Ford's machinery was used more flexibly than the Fordist model of dedicated machinery suggests, and the Ford Model T was not an unchanging product, one basis for its success being slight design variation (Williams *et al.* 1992). While not fully concurring with this view, French regulationist Robert Boyer (1988: 89) cites approvingly Hounshell's (1984) belief that "Ford's original model of industrial organization was replaced by a more flexible one during the 1920s and 1930s".[18] These points raise doubts about the usual Fordist stereotype of low-skilled workers performing the same task repetitively, with no contribution to shaping work organisation. 'Fordist' industrial history sees Fordist production processes dominating from at least World War Two, although some concede that this does not necessarily mean all industry used Fordist methods. They were influential in high profit sectors and as an 'ideal' type (Badham and Mathews 1989). Ogden (1993: 3) states that Fordism took about 50 years to dominate manufacturing, implying less relevance in other sectors. Braverman (1974: 196) notes that in 1966 three quarters of US metal production was in batches of fifty or less, suggesting Fordist mass production was not universal, even at Fordism's zenith. Many criticise post-Fordist views for not being specific about how to determine the dominance of specific production types, and failing to provide criteria for knowing when a form is ascending or in decline (Campbell 1990).

Much Australian comment on Taylorist influence in Australia is criticised for using analyses of other countries, especially the USA (Wright 1993). One view is that Taylorism has been dominant in Australia since the middle of this century (Mathews 1989a). Alternatively, Wright argues that Australian managers may have liked Taylorism, but they applied it selectively, using its techniques along with others (Wright 1995).[19]

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[18]   Some French regulationists' work is criticised for over-simplifying their views as a whole (Hampson 1991a).

[19]   Writers perceiving Taylorism's dominance over Australian managers tend to share Braverman's (1974) view that Taylorism was the primary influence over twentieth century capitalist management. They thereby repeat the tendency of believing that management espousal of Taylorism reflects their practice accurately.

A tendency for those perceiving a succession of management approaches is to see Taylorism in all job fragmentation and workplace hierarchy initiatives. A more precise definition, identifying Taylorism with measures such as work study, time measurement, planning departments and incentive payments, and careful investigation of their incidence, suggests it was not as universal as often claimed (Wright 1993).[20] Taylorist methods were important in large scale, "labour-intensive, highly sub-divided and repetitive work settings", such as the car, clothing and electrical appliance industries, but otherwise they were less relevant (Wright 1995: 155). Also, as automation increased from the late 1960s, Taylorist methods waned.

If Taylorism and Fordism did not and do not dominate all industry sectors, what is the basis for arguing that the Fordist production model was (or is) dominant? Other 'non-Fordist' sectors, such as construction and agriculture, contribute significantly to productivity growth and the economy, but in the Fordist schema they are of secondary importance to analysing work. For post-Fordists such as Badham and Mathews (1989) the co-existence of different production models does not undermine the notion that Fordism is developing into post-Fordism. Models can co-exist and compete but one model is pre-eminent (in terms of profitability and innovation), subsequently spreading through the economy.[21] Following Hampson (1991a, also Amin 1994a, Campbell 1990) this conceptualisation does not adequately establish the basis on which a production model can be said to dominate an economy.

This section has argued that there are problems with conceptualisations of industrial history that perceive a lineal succession of production models as such views neglect variation within and between economic sectors. The post-Fordist view of the progressive development of work organisation, of one model succeeding another, is built on an over-generalised theory of industrial development that implies predetermined production model choices.

2.3.2 Post-Fordism and Production Model Choices

In this section difficulties with the Australian optimistic post-Fordists' view of contemporary work organisation choice are discussed. Is the contemporary transformation of work determined by economic change and new technologies, or social processes, or a mixture of the two? There is ambiguity in the Australian post-Fordists' analysis of choice in contemporary work change.

Australian post-Fordists like Mathews (1989a) argue that the Fordist crisis and

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20   Further discussion of Taylorism in Australia in Chris Wright (1993) and Richard Dunford (1988).

21   Campbell (1990) questions applying the concept of paradigms to capitalist management. He sees an appeal by the users of the concept to the advance of scientific research. However, scientific research is generally thought to employ rigorous methods and is not meant to have pre-determined results. Managers of capitalist enterprises desire an adequate rate of profit and can use a vast range of strategies to achieve that. Applying paradigm to capitalist management oversimplifies the options available to management. It implies that management has clear, exclusive alternatives, not recognising the pragmatism of management to pick, choose and combine from various approaches, which may appear contradictory.

technological change are major forces initiating a new, post-Fordist organisation of production. Management is driven by 'objective' conditions to adopt post-Fordist industrial relations and work organisation, with more humane use of new computer technologies, more interesting jobs and more co-operative industrial relations (Mathews 1989a: 126). In this, management's motivation is not an altruistic concern about alienating jobs but "economic pressures which are forcing firms to reconsider their Fordist assumptions" (Mathews 1989a: 127). At the most optimistic it is postulated that: "Industrial democracy has become a matter of economic survival" (Mathews 1988: 20). Employers "are realising the increasing importance of a changed relationship with their employees and unions. From the unions' point of view, industrial democracy can be shown to be endemic to profitability, and to long-term survival" (Ogden 1993: 5). In this formulation, economic and technological imperatives determine work organisation.

Mathews, as noted above, denies that his view of Fordist crisis is technologically determinist. He states that it is useful to see industrial development as a series of shifts in "technoeconomic paradigm" (1992b: 114-117). Once a new technology is successful and widely used, firms not adapting to it and the new competitive conditions will not survive (Mathews 1992b: 116). Mathews maintains, however, that social processes determine work organisation. In this vein new developments are seen as opening up possibilities for union movement intervention "over many of its most cherished aspirations and goals, including the democratisation of work" (Mathews 1992b: 104). Badham and Mathews (1989) argue that employer and union approaches determine work organisation and industrial relations. Managers can, and do, choose non-'post-Fordist' approaches. They may persist with intensified Fordist techniques or relocate to Third World sites. New technology may be combined with further work intensification and deskilling (Mathews 1989a: 125). Thus, post-Fordist transformation is not inevitable, contradicting any 'techno-economic' imperative to greater worker skill and workplace democracy. In this view, post-Fordist change depends significantly on union and worker agitation. But against this notion, and observations of continuing 'Fordism', optimistic post-Fordists believe Australian business will not survive if post-Fordist methods are not adopted.

Australian post-Fordists tend to suggest two choices for management,[22] thereby positing a simple binary opposition, misrepresenting the range of approaches available to management and unions (Campbell 1990, Sayer and Walker 1992, Chapter 5). Campbell argues that Mathews' post-Fordist model posits a choice between two or three global models that fails to comprehend the "social processes of action and the various points at which choices are made" (1990: 19). This approach

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[22]   Although, in the article Mathews co-wrote with Curtain on award restructuring, two alternative ideal types are constructed to assist analysis. These ideal types are not intended to represent existing enterprises (Curtain and Mathews 1990).

underrates production organisation complexity and leaves little room for choice as the more humane implementation of new technologies yields higher productivity, while retaining existing work organisation will result in "stagnation" (Campbell 1990: 19).

This difficulty with optimistic post-Fordism is evident in its failure to adequately distinguish between Japanese 'lean production', and German and Swedish production practices, which differ substantially in work organisation and industrial relations (Hampson, Ewer and Smith 1994). Integral to Japanese 'lean production' is high worker visibility, enabling greater monitoring of worker performance, and stressing of the production process by minimising stocks, indirect labour and non-active work time, leading some to label Japanese lean production 'management by stress' and 'management by fear' (Hampson *et al.* 1994: 236). Work is standardised. In the 'European' production system some buffer stocks remain and stress is lower. 'Lean production' includes "sophisticated human resource management packages, an important part of which is the attempt to create a new workplace culture" (Hampson *et al.* 1994: 239). Management desires greater worker consent and support for corporate objectives. Management initiatives, such as Quality Circles and Total Quality Management, can give the impression of worker acceptance of 'lean production' by using forms of employee participation. Alternatively, when major characteristics of the Japanese job market are considered (including enterprise unions, enterprise specific training practices and a segmented labour market) workers have quite limited choices.

Difficulties with optimistic post-Fordism partly reflect different emphases in the work of Australian post-Fordists. In Mathews' work, for instance, three conflicting views on post-Fordism have been identified (Hampson, *et al.* 1994). 'Strong' post-Fordism hypothesises technological and economic imperatives driving management to seek co-operation with higher skilled workers, who have more autonomy and decision-making rights in more democratic workplaces. A 'weak' version hypothesises work organisation options for management: it can increase workplace democracy or reinforce Taylorist practices. A third position sees management imposing more responsibility and work on employees, possibly expanding work skills but not increasing workplace democracy or weakening managerial prerogative.

Hampson argues that post-Fordist views repeat a mistake of early labour process perspectives of imputing to technology a determinative role in shaping the nature of work (1991b: 77). Such views over-state the influence of technology and under-state alternate strategies available to management for pursuing its objectives, (including when new technologies are introduced). Technological determinist positions imply that technological change develops autonomously, without influence from society. A growing body of scholarship rejects this view, arguing that social forces influence the design and use of new technologies (Wajcman 1991).

Others suggest that new technologies can be, and are, successfully used within Fordist industrial relations structures, contrary to the notion of a predominant trend to increased worker autonomy. New information technologies can give management "far greater potential for oppressive surveillance and control" (Hyman, 1988: 54). What are interpreted by some as post-Fordist developments in work and industrial relations are viewed very differently by others. To its critics, optimistic post-Fordism tends to posit just one contemporary production model. It cannot embrace or account for the current variety of restructuring responses, giving insufficient attention to work changes which do not fit the post-Fordist mould (Campbell 1990).

2.3.3 Taylorism Intensified

An instance of a different interpretation of modern production changes is an account of American automobile production that contradicts the view that 'leading' industries (like car manufacture) are increasing worker skills. Rather than a new regime of co-operation between employees and management, changes in the 1980s involved a marked increase in stress for production workers (Parker and Slaughter 1988). Management introduced speed-up; just-in-time stock organisation; contracting work outside the main corporation; designing technology to minimise indirect labour and reduce labour costs; reducing scrap and re-working; and tighter management control (Parker and Slaughter 1988: 16). Contrary to a trend away from Taylorism and Fordism, this system "intensifies Taylorism", tending to "specify every move a worker makes in far greater detail than ever before" (Parker and Slaughter 1988: 19).

This system "uses stress of all kinds - physical, social, and psychological - to regulate and boost production" (Parker and Slaughter 1988: 13). Production system stressing permits greater production from the same or less inputs, including paid labour time. Worker output is increased, which more positive interpretations see as indicating greater worker motivation. Multi-skilling in this 'management by stress' system increases management's ability to re-deploy workers. The primary concerns of management with its workforce are their work attitudes and ability to perform tasks at sufficient speed, although it uses a rhetoric of participation and team-work. This system includes a continuous drive to tap the workers' knowledge of their work, distinguishing it from Taylorism where 'production' workers are separated from production process design. This analysis is much more critical of modern work changes than optimistic post-Fordists who theorise a new, more humane mode of production organisation at hand.

2.3.4 'Peripheral Employment'

The optimistic post-Fordist thesis is further criticised for neglecting the complex issue of the growth of part-time and other forms of 'marginal' or 'atypical'

work, such as, casual, sub-contracting, and outwork or homework (Campbell and Burgess 1993). Using terms such as 'marginal' is criticised for implying that such forms are abnormal and not integral to the 'economy'. These 'flexible' forms of work are growing in some economic sectors.[23] One optimistic post-Fordist response has been to argue that:

> In fact, in a well-managed economy there should be plentiful supplies of casual, semi-skilled jobs, particularly in the service sectors. These are needed to allow certain firms to offer low-cost services, giving a range of such services in the marketplace, and to enable students, young people, homemakers and others to take a job without necessarily committing themselves to a career (Mathews 1992b: 121).

Saying that such forms of work are necessary for a balanced economy implies acceptance of 'atypical' working conditions at a time when such insecure jobs are increasing as a proportion of total employment. Some criticise growing labour market segmentation and peripheral status becoming "increasingly the norm" (Hyman 1988: 56). Some argue that growing internationalisation of national economies is accompanied by a growing under-class in advanced capitalist countries, a trend that this is "under-weighted" by the post-Fordists (Rustin 1989: 69).

2.3.5 Post-Fordism - Manufacturing Bias

Many 'peripheral' jobs are in service industries. Some post-Fordist theories have been criticised for concentrating on manufacturing while jobs in that sector are falling as a proportion of total employment.[24] Concentration on manufacturing by optimistic post-Fordists gives a skewed perception of the overall changes to work. Service occupations tend to offer much poorer job security, less pay and career advance opportunity than 'traditional' industrial jobs in manufacturing.[25] However, although their discussion focusses on goods production, Badham and Mathews assert their production systems model can also apply to the services sector (1989: 196). Mathews points to his analysis of work change at a large insurance company and at the Australian Taxation Office as indicating the relevance of post-Fordist work changes and analysis to service areas (1992b: 104). Accepting for the moment his analysis of the significance of work changes in those areas, these instances do not represent all

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[23]   The growth of peripheral forms of employment in 'advanced' Western countries has been compared to "the traditional Japanese pattern: a fluctuating periphery of satellite employment provides a buffer which enables major firms to offer 'core' workers 'lifelong' jobs, meritocratic career progression and a modicum of group-participation in workplace decision-making" (Purdy 1988: 151). Purdy argues that the continuation of this trend will weaken collective identity among workers as different groups have more clearly differentiated interests (Purdy 1988: 151).

[24]   For example, Hyman 1988: 52. See Ferner and Hyman 1992: xliii-xliv, Tables A.4, A.5 and A.6 for civilian employment in agriculture, industry and services through Europe from 1960 to 1989, indicating reductions in the first two sectors and growth in the services sector. These figures suggest national variation is significant: e.g: in 1989 the lowest proportion of civilian labour force in services was 45.7% (Portugal) and highest was 68.8% (The Netherlands).

[25]   This duality tends to correspond to the gender division of labour.

work in the services sectors. This is especially the case if the current growth area in paid employment - part-time and casual work in services sectors - is considered. Both the diversity of this area and the fact that many service jobs are in manufacturing suggest that caution is necessary before making assumptions about 'service' jobs. It is notable, however, that in service industries, competition is often over labour associated costs.[26]

Part of the rationale for employers using 'marginal' workers, for instance by replacing permanent employees with short-term labour, is that their employment can be 'varied' more easily to meet changing market requirements.[27] A focus on labour costs, and the associated growth in 'marginal' jobs, implies a different management emphasis than the post-Fordist model of higher skilled jobs, greater workplace democracy and more common interest between employers and workers. The shift of political power against labour and the welfare state have made advances for workers more difficult (Ferner and Hyman 1992, Rustin 1989). However, this does not negate the need to study contemporary work changes to ascertain the nature of recent developments.

2.4   Conclusion

Much discussion of modern economic change identifies increasing worker skills and more co-operative industrial relations following from the wane of the Fordist model of production. This chapter focussed on one example of such theory: optimistic post-Fordism in Australia and its account of production organisation and industrial relations. While this perspective is not only concerned with these issues, many using this perspective have directed their attention to these employment issues, distinguishing them somewhat from other frameworks addressing broader political, economic and social developments. There is more variety in post-Fordist theory than implied by the optimistic version that gained influence in Australia through the 1980s. In its cruder forms, this theory is based on a lineal view of industrial development, envisaging transformation of Fordist production organisation to post-Fordist methods, with significant change to labour use in a shift from low-skilled operatives to high skilled workers with co-operative relations with management.

The critiques of optimistic post-Fordist theory outlined in this Chapter suggest more varied production organisation and industrial relations through this century than

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[26]   This is illustrated in the hotel industry, where a high proportion of employees are casual. It was reported that in the accommodation sector in 1986-87 "43 per cent of the workforce are casuals" (Benson and Worland 1992). This comes from a case study of a five-star residential hotel in Melbourne. Overtime constitutes less than one per cent of this hotel's wages bill. 51 per cent of employees were casuals in June 1989. Casuals enable more specific tailoring of labour needs to market requirements. The hotel is part of an international chain. Management of the hotel is reported to perceive the achievement of their objective as relying on increasing revenue and minimising costs.

[27]   Not unrelated to this use of non-permanent staff is the practice of utilising one category of worker (on a lower pay rate) to do work which might, and otherwise would, be done by a worker from a higher paid category.

conceptualisations of successive dominant production models. Taylorist management techniques were less pervasive than often suggested, being more applicable in some settings than others, and their use did not exclude other strategies and policies. Significant recent growth in 'marginal' jobs does not suggest the post-Fordist scenario of growing co-operation between, and mutual benefit for, employees and employers. I have argued that various production organisation and industrial relations arrangements are possible.

I have suggested that 'optimistic post-Fordism' is ambiguous about production model choice, resulting from different positions in optimistic post-Fordist theory, (for instance, critics identify three distinct positions in Mathews' work, Hampson *et al.* 1994). There are tensions between postulating 'techno-economic' features that encourage workplace democracy and stressing that unions need to campaign for post-Fordism. Recognising contemporary work change trends that are not post-Fordist tends to suggest that managers have technology and production organisation choices, and that a social process (affected by workers and unions) determines work organisation, whereas hypothesising a 'techno-economic' loading implies little choice and limited effect from social processes.

Possibly the imprecision in the optimistic post-Fordists' view of the onset of post-Fordist production strategies reflects pragmatic hesitancy about prematurely anticipating a post-Fordist future (especially recognising management's attachment to established hierarchical routines), and implies acknowledgment that different strategies may indeed be evident in contemporary Australian workplaces. The empirical research of the thesis investigates the nature of recent work organisation and industrial relations change in two case studies, testing the applicability of the optimistic post-Fordist thesis. The focus is on whether a rigid Taylorist and Fordist production organisation is being superseded; whether work skills are increasing; and whether more co-operative industrial relations and more democratic workplaces are developing.

Chapter Three discusses 1980s developments in Australian industrial relations to evaluate signs of post-Fordist developments, discussing the social forces influencing these changes and the objectives of various groups. I argue that there is no simple and universal model of employee management that ensures commercial success. There are at least two ideal types, one using more skilled workers in more democratic workplaces and another focussed on cutting labour costs, although a wider range of strategies is evident. I argue that labour market and societal trends suggest more varied and often less democratic developments than the Australian post-Fordists hypothesise.

Chapter Three: 1980s Australian Industrial Relations Change

3.1 Introduction

This chapter locates the research of recent workplace change in the context of late twentieth century Australian industrial relations, discussing developments in this area to provide a background for the case studies that follow in the next two chapters. This discussion aims to investigate the applicability of the 'optimistic post-Fordist' thesis to developments in Australian industrial relations in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The main dimensions of the 'optimistic post-Fordist' vision examined in this study are that work is becoming more skilled, workers more autonomous within their employment and industrial relations more co-operative and democratic. The thesis investigates the applicability of this general theory in two specific instances.

Opinions vary about recent Australian industrial relations reform. Various factors influence these differences, such as perspectives on Australian political economy and the competing interests of distinct groups (including unions, workers, employers and distinct industries). From the mid 1980s Australia's industrial relations system moved away from linking wage increases to prices, to relate wages to productivity. By the end of the 1980s, award restructuring was central in Australian industrial relations, part of an increasing concern with productivity and workplace level industrial relations. Interpretations of, and responses to award restructuring also varied, with some seeing it as offering potential to assist higher skilled work while others believed it did not undermine the debilitating focus on centralised awards in Australian industrial relations practice. A longer term perspective suggests that wage determination in Australia is a changing process, reflecting "not merely prevailing economic forces, but also social and normative forces" (Deery and Plowman 1991: 370). The recent enterprise focus marks a significant change in the aims of Australia's industrial relations system, privileging economic considerations over other 'social' concerns (Thorpe, in Williams with Thorpe 1992, Chapter 10: 226).

This chapter addresses the views of major groups in Australian industrial relations in the 1980s, indicating some 'common ground' but also substantial differences about contemporary Australian industrial relations and work change. This review suggests major variance between sectors and enterprises, and fragmentary evidence of the post-Fordist vision for modern industrial relations. Changes to Australian industrial relations in this period also permit comment on the influence of Australia's industrial relations institutions on workplace arrangements.

3.2 Changing Australian Industrial Relations

In the 1980s, economic problems, particularly unemployment, became more intractable. Criticism of Australia's industrial relations system also increased. The question of how that system affects the economy has long been subject to debate (Lansbury and Macdonald 1992). One major criticism was that the system did not permit sufficient flexibility for modern market conditions and impeded Australian enterprise (as do unions, largely because their structure developed in tandem with the industrial relations institutions) (Drago, Wooden and Sloan 1992). Award restructuring was part of an approach to change work regulation in Australia in the context of increasing demands for reform. It offered the potential to address claimed labour inflexibilities of centralised industrial. That system sought to accommodate demands for deregulated industrial relations by moving away from granting pay increases to all award workers simultaneously and allowing more local bargaining over work conditions. From the mid 1980s pay increases were increasingly related to productivity. In this vein, in 1991, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) accepted enterprise bargaining as the primary 'way' to determine wages. By the late 1980s the AIRC had joined the calls for Australian business to become more internationally competitive, especially by developing a more skilled workforce (strongly endorsed by the ALP Commonwealth Government), but employer responses suggested diverse employer production strategies and approaches to improved competitiveness. Award restructuring was central in the AIRC's late 1980s decisions. Different groups adopted differing responses, with varying implications for post-Fordist style workplace change. The following discussion introduces competing views of the changes 'needed' in Australian industrial relations, revealing different approaches to the 'optimistic post-Fordist' vision of workplace change.

3.2.1 Business Views

Although the Accord encouraged more co-operative industrial relations through the 1980s, some employers became increasingly dissatisfied with the centralised tribunal system. Some supported radical change to that system and some used legal avenues other than the industrial tribunals to seek resolution of industrial relations issues (Alexander and Lewer 1996: 94-96; Wishart 1992). Through the 1980s and early 1990s, the AIRC tried to meet demands for greater enterprise flexibility by permitting increased workplace level determination of work. However, these moves did not satisfy some employer demands for enterprise-focussed industrial relations, notably those of the influential Business Council of Australia (BCA). These demands were more expressly met by the 1990s conservative politicians who implemented more 'radical' industrial relations deregulation policies.[1] Underlying such initiatives was the

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[1]   Liberal State governments and the Howard Coalition have changed industrial relations regulatory

belief that centralised industrial relations hinder productivity. Two important points, however, about the deregulation agenda are that it is not simply about dismantling industrial relations regulations but seeks a different regulatory framework,[2] and that not all business supports radical deregulation, perceiving benefits from the centralised system such as 'disciplining' unions and employees (for example, by restraining wage demands).

Nonetheless, an influential business view, that the centralised arbitration system obstructs business efficiency because it imposes the same work regulation rules across the economy (Drago, Wooden and Sloan 1992), gained support. In this view governments needed to 'sell' their nations as attractive sites for investment, including by making industrial relations more 'business friendly' and reducing barriers to international business mobility (McLaughlin 1990). Australian workplace industrial relations were claimed to burden individual workplaces with multiple unions and industrial awards, and craft or occupational unions rather than industry or enterprise unions, making Australia an unattractive site for investment (McLaughlin 1990: 54-58).[3] This union structure was said to produce uniform wages and working conditions across awards and businesses, thereby restricting enterprise focus. The award system and union structure needed a radical overhaul to permit enterprise level determination of work arrangements. Enterprise bargaining would enable companies to adapt operations to market demands.

From the mid 1980s the BCA initiated a campaign to dismantle Australia's centralised industrial relations tribunals and to increase direct negotiations between management and workers over working conditions.[4] Interestingly, it has been suggested, in an apparent reference to the USA, that as much as four fifths of employee behaviour is not determined by formal rules and career structures, but by unwritten habit, routine and socialisation in the employing organisation (Bray and Littler 1988: 564, quoting Perrow, 1972: 156). Australia's institutional industrial relations framework gives a different scenario, with varying, but significant influence of industrial tribunals over workplace practices (Littler, Kitay and Quinlan 1989).

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practices, influenced by the view that Australia's industrial relations system and practices needed major deregulation. Different measures have been adopted by the various States, with, for instance, Victoria effectively abolishing awards while Western and South Australia adopted less radical approaches (Murray 1995: 132 in Spoehr and Broomhill [eds] 1995, and see other chapters in that collection on State strategies), although WA has introduced strong 'anti-union' provisions.

2   As noted by Broomhill and Spoehr (1995: 19), Dabscheck (1993) argued that the conservative labour market and industrial relations demands are really about "new regulatory arrangements wrapped in the rhetoric of deregulation". The anti-government element of this ideology is no doubt designed to connect with the popular appeal of anti-government/anti-politics rhetoric.

3   A similar argument about the structure of Australian unions is made by Sloan and Wooden 1990. McLaughlin advocated a two-stream system for Australian industrial relations: one retaining awards and an award-free alternative, "an agreements stream for those who want to be world-class firms or who are keen to have a crack at world markets" (1990: 63-65).

4   The BCA, representing Australia's largest companies, was created in 1983 as tensions in the then peak employer organisation, the Confederation of Australian Industry, developed over business approaches to the Hawke Government, economic recession and structural change (Plowman and Street 1993: 94-95).

However, Australia's system in the 1980s did not preclude direct management-employee negotiations. Clearly the BCA wanted less tribunal involvement in work regulation, but its was not the only employer approach to industrial relations in 1980s Australia. The demands of manufacturing employers, as represented in particular by the Metal Trades Industry Association (MTIA), for changing Australia's industrial relations system were less 'radical'. Manufacturers, especially in the metal industry, were not as opposed to the tribunal system, appreciating its restraining effect on a relatively well organised and unionised workforce capable of disruptive industrial action, as experienced in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s (Wright 1990).

3.2.2 Union Strategy Changes

It is widely recognised that the Australian union movement changed its strategy through the 1980s, from a primary focus on wages to a wider interest in enterprise viability. There was much effort to gain management co-operation in jointly addressing production issues. The deep recession in the early 1980s and relatively high unemployment levels from the mid 1970s contributed to this shift. From the early 1980s the union movement adopted a 'strategic' or 'political' unionism by which unions sought to influence national development (Burgess and Macdonald 1990a). The 1980s/1990s Federal ALP Governments and the unions, through their peak organisation the ACTU, entered a series of agreements, the Accords, central to which was national wages determination. These achieved wage restraint.[5] Over time the Accords sanctioned changing wages determination from uniform changes for workers as a whole to more localised determination of wages and conditions. Greater enterprise level determination of working arrangements fitted with the post-Fordist prognosis of a need for firms to tailor their operations for specific market niches (Mathews 1989a).

The first Accord contained provisions for greater government intervention in industry development policy (Stilwell 1986).[6] By the mid 1980s this government policy emphasis was overshadowed by moves to change Australian wages determination and work regulation structures and processes in response to economic difficulties. Also by this time the demand for more internationally competitive business in Australia was widespread. This was, and is, often articulated in terms of needing to raise productivity. The unions, led by the ACTU, recognised that Australia needed to "restructure the economy to improve its long term performance" (Curtain 1990: 446). An important document embodying this union view was *Australia Reconstructed.*[7] ACTU secretary, Bill Kelty, summarised the dominant trade union perspective

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[5]   From 1983 to 1989 real unit labour costs fell by almost 15 per cent (Macken 1989: 93).

[6]   However, the Government was more interested in deregulatory economic policy (shown in tariff reductions and financial deregulation) than implied by these provisions in the Accord.

[7]   A report of a 1986 study visit by union and federal government (Trade Development Council, Department of Trade) representatives, published in 1987.

following the report in its Foreword:

> We all must have a strong commitment towards fostering the highest possible economic growth and its equitable distribution, and to achieving the lowest possible levels of inflation and unemployment. Structural change and the promotion of a productive culture are necessary to enhance our international competitiveness, while employers need to accept that structural change and new work organisation are not simply opportunities to shed labour, and that workers need to be party to any change (ACTU/TDC, 1987: v).

The union movement's view of its role had changed. Enterprise competitiveness was prioritised, although unions were encouraged to not simply accept management views of enterprise requirements. A change in union strategy to a more co-operative approach was suggested by lower levels of industrial disputes.[8] At the enterprise level, many unions adopted a 'productivist' approach, a central element of which was encouraging Australian business to aim for quality production based on skilled workers (Burgess and Macdonald 1990a). This meant changing Australia's system of work regulation to encourage skills development and less rigid delineation of work and job boundaries.

The changed union approach, implicitly accepting that worker attributes are most critical to enterprise success, was strongly criticised by some for acceding to a limited view of the determinants of productivity (Burgess 1989). This altered union strategy, concentrating on the micro-economic level of the workplace and firm, was condemned as weak, defensive and accommodating to employer aims, alienating union members from union officials, as the latter agreed with management proposals sometimes opposed by workers (Burgess and Macdonald 1990a). Unions were also criticised for reducing demands for more active government industry development policy (Ewer *et al.* 1991).

This brief discussion has indicated some divergent views of the connections between the economy and industrial relations, of problems in Australian industrial relations and likely solutions. Australian unions, especially at the peak council level, developed a strategy aiming to create post-Fordist workplaces with higher skilled and more autonomous workers, and more co-operative industrial relations. Among employers the commitment to post-Fordist workplaces was more mixed. Possibly the strongest employer support for post-Fordism came from the Metal Trades Industry Association (MTIA)[9].

3.3 National Wages System Changes Focus

This section discusses the response of the national industrial relations system

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[8]   According to ABS 1992 Industrial Disputes, Australia, Cat. No. 6322.0, Table 1, working days lost per thousand employees was lower through 1983 to 1992 compared to the 1970s and early 1980s. (See, for a comparison, Fig. 2.2 in Deery and Plowman 1991.)

[9]   See its December 1989 *Award Restructuring In The Metal And Engineering Industry, The Way To Proceed.*

to changing economic conditions, partly to assess the influence of post-Fordist trends on the industrial relations system and the nature of workplace change in Australia through the 1980s. From the 1983 election of the Hawke led ALP Government until 1986, the AIRC generally granted wage increases that matched price rises, thereby maintaining a form of wage indexation (Plowman 1990a).[10] In late 1985 the Accord was renegotiated in the face of national economic difficulties, so that in 1986 the Government no longer supported full wage indexation (meeting price rises) and the AIRC moved to introduce a more explicit link between wages and productivity, away from national wage adjustments to industry sector and employer level determination of work arrangements.[11] Access to award superannuation was promoted, but it was not granted universally to all workers, being available on an individual award basis, with union commitments to increase productivity.

3.3.1 Two Tiered Wages System

In March 1987 the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (ACAC) (as the AIRC was then) introduced a two-tiered wages system. Wage increases were not given to all award covered workers, like previous wage indexation increases such as during 1975 to 1981 and 1983 to 1986. Under this 1987 decision unions had to apply to the AIRC to vary their awards.[12] The 'second tier' of this decision introduced a new wage fixing rule: the Restructuring and Efficiency Principle (REP) under which unions and employers (and their associations) had to negotiate work and management practice changes to improve efficiency. These could include multi-skilling, broad-banding, and award restructuring. The Commission hoped negotiations would occur at the enterprise level, but they varied from industry to enterprise level bargaining.[13] Buchanan points out that bargaining practice variety is not new in Australia: "complexity and diversity has been a key feature of the Australian industrial relations system since its foundation" (1992: 52), suggesting more flexibility in Australian industrial relations than claims of system inflexibility, uniformity and inhibition of direct bargaining (Drago, Wooden and Sloan 1992: Chapter 2).

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[10]   In September 1983 the AIRC awarded a 4.3 per cent wage increase. Full indexation was awarded in its decisions of April 1985, November 1985 and June 1986 (Deery and Plowman 1991: 365) The exception was in 1984 with no wage increases in the March and June quarters as the AIRC accepted the Federal Government's view that the Medicare levy effectively made price increase over that time negative (Stilwell 1991: 43).

[11]   With the Commonwealth Industrial Relations Act of 1988, the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (ACAC) was replaced by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC).

[12]   Workers' access to these pay increases was relatively slow. The Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) estimated that at the end of January 1989, second tier wage increases had been achieved for 80 per cent of award covered workers, and that by the end of that year the increase would have reached nearly all workers (DIR April 1990: 3).

[13]   DIR (April 1990: 4-5), referring to research by McDonald and Rimmer (1988).

3.3.2 Responses to Two Tier Decision

The Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) found that 'cost offsets' was the primary aim in responses to the second tier principle, with measures to reduce labour costs most common, although slightly more than a quarter of 868 REP decisions analysed by the DIR included broadbanding, multi-skilling, award restructuring and career paths, implying a wider agenda than reducing labour costs.[14] Although critical of the limited approaches to labour pursued under the two tier decision, the DIR welcomed moves to enterprise bargaining (DIR April 1990: 3-4). Timo (1989: 402), giving a union view of industrial change and structural efficiency, claimed that in many cases the second tier negotiations "process descended into a negative cost-cutting exercise by employers who saw opportunities to shave-off award conditions and entitlements". To the extent that REP agreements were conceived in this way, a cost minimisation strategy is indicated, contrary to the post-Fordist vision of more skilled workers in more co-operative industrial relations with their employers, although the DIR analysis of REP decisions suggests some variation in employer responses.

Reviewing the REP decision, Rimmer and Zappala (1988) contended that Australia had high external labour market flexibility and low internal labour market flexibility.[15] Different types of labour flexibility have various implications for workers, ranging from harmful (where minimising labour costs is emphasised) to beneficial (where a more skilled workforce is envisaged). Rimmer and Zappala identified five main forms of flexibility in Australian labour markets, concluding from their review of twelve major REP agreements that these "went furthest in the areas of internal numerical and functional flexibility" (1988: 588).[16] They argued that the REP experience showed "considerable gains in labour market flexibility can be won through existing industrial relations institutions providing appropriate policies are adopted" (Rimmer and Zappala 1988: 589). Thus unions and industrial tribunals were judged to have contributed positively to enterprise efficiency, in line with the Australian post-Fordists' view of unions helping to create more 'modern' production. Rimmer and Zappala (1988: 565) agreed the economy was moving away from mass markets, where competitive success relied on price, to more specialised markets

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[14]   DIR (April 1990) report on REP decisions identified the measures introduced in 868 decisions in both the Federal and State systems contained in the DIR database up to the end of May 1988. The most commonly mentioned changes were the introduction of electronic funds transfer (354 agreements); 241 decisions covered broadbanding, multi-skilling, award restructuring and career paths; 230 dealt with demarcation (in many cases providing dispute handling procedures); 241 established dispute settling or avoidance procedures; 241 reduced non-productive time at work; 197 increased flexibility in taking RDO's.

[15]   Companies in Australia tend to rely on recruiting staff from outside their company. In effect business has relied very significantly on the public education system for workforce training.

[16]   The five types of flexibility identified are external numerical (i.e alter employee numbers); internal numerical (where working hours and timing of work are changed); functional (workers able to perform a range of tasks); wage (use of bonus schemes and the like); and procedural (the way workplace consultations and negotiations are conducted).

where, "broadly speaking, firms require a workforce that is more adaptable in terms of numbers, skills, labour costs, and intensity of utilisation".

3.4 Award Restructuring

Unions opposed continuing the cost offsets approach of the REP decision. Their response was important as their overall bargaining position had improved with higher economic growth in the later 1980s. As well, early in the ALP Government's new term (re-elected in 1987), unions would more likely gain member and officials' support for a 'militant' wages campaign. However, through 1988 award restructuring became the dominant union approach to wages policy, adopted by the ACTU executive in December 1988, although some unions wanted a general wages claim based on cost of living increases (Dabscheck 1995: 58). Award restructuring became central in Australian industrial relations, supported by the ACTU, the AIRC, the Federal Government, and metal industry employers.[17]

The August 1988 National Wage Case Decision introduced the Structural Efficiency Principle (SEP) (ACAC Print H4000), building on the REP, continuing the focus on workplace productivity and encouraging a broad approach to award restructuring rather than one aiming for short-term cost gains. Award restructuring had begun in some areas in the mid-1980s, especially in the metals industry, and was pursued by some under the REP, including by the Australian Public Service (APS).[18] The SEP made two wage increases available but, like the previous decision, they were not given simultaneously to all award workers. Individual awards could access the increases as unions agreed to "co-operate positively in a fundamental review of .. [their] award with a view to implementing measures to improve the efficiency of industry and provide workers with access to more varied, fulfilling and better paid jobs" (ACAC Print H4000: 11). Under the SEP, multi-skilling, skill related career paths and greater flexibility of labour were encouraged (Macken 1989: 24). However, two emphases could be found in the decision, one benefiting employers (by improving efficiency) and another promising workers better pay, jobs and career paths. Whether these two emphases were mutually exclusive would be revealed in the workplace implementation of the decision. The second emphasis was more in line with the post-Fordist vision of the compatibility of more interesting, higher paid jobs and more productive industry.

The Federal ALP Government promulgated award restructuring as 'The Way Ahead' with benefits for both workers and employers.[19] It identified labour market

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17   Curtain and Mathews, in a piece published in 1990, comment that it was the "central industrial relations issue" (republished 1992: 433). See also Plowman (1990a).

18   Thorpe (Chapter 10 of Williams with Thorpe 1992: 210-247) sees the first formal introduction of award restructuring occurring in the 1987 National Wage Case.

19   For example, see the publication *Award Restructuring. Federal Government Initiatives*, (subtitled "The Way Ahead") produced by the Commonwealth DIR, in co-operation with the Departments of

reform as crucial to an internationally competitive Australia and rejected the short-term cost offsets approach taken under the REP.[20] Treasurer Keating reiterated the Government view that award restructuring would benefit both employers and workers, increasing the skill, flexibility and productivity of employees and providing them with "more interesting, varied and better-paid jobs".[21] The Government supported a high-skill, consultative employee management policy requiring more fundamental 'structural' award reform with "revision of job classification structures, multi-skilling, and the provision of new career paths, underpinned by major reforms to skill formation and training arrangements" (DIR 1989b: 2). Award restructuring was seen by some, such as former industrial relations commissioner Macken, as the way to retain a manufacturing industry as it involved creating a more skilled workforce (Macken 1989: 41).

3.4.1 Second Structural Efficiency Decision

The second SEP decision of the August 1989 National Wage Case continued to encourage "efficiency and productivity" improvements (AIRC Print H9100: 1). However the AIRC was "concerned that conditions of employment have not been included in negotiations [over improving productivity] as a matter of course", listing measures it thought "appropriate for consideration ...[to] enhance flexibility and the efficiency of the industry" (Print H9100: 9, 10). These included widening the spread of ordinary work hours (possibly including the 'weekend'); allowing more flexible taking of annual leave "to maximise production"; reviewing part-time and casual terms of employment; changing penalty and overtime arrangements (including time off for overtime); encouraging pay by electronic transfer and allowing longer pay periods; overall, permitting measures reducing costs associated with employing labour (Print H9100: 10). Unions criticised this focus, seeing it as impeding a more skilled workforce (Dabscheck 1995: 61). The emphasis in these measures suggests the AIRC trying to meet the cost focus of many employers.

Part of the context for this wage case were sectoral labour shortages. The MTIA argued this put "explosive pressures on wages", rejecting other employer views of little risk of wages' growth at that time (Print H9100: 6, MTIA submission). Other employer groups were more interested in deregulating the wage determination process.[22] Unions, overall, wanted industrial relations reform to continue within the centralised system. The ACTU reached a wage restraint agreement with the Federal Government for 1989/90, although in a 'booming' economy, pressure from workers

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Employment, Education and Training, and of Industry, Technology and Commerce; no date, but appears to be 1989.

[20]   See, for instance, DIR (1989b), *Award Restructuring, The Task Ahead*, Canberra, AGPS.

[21]   Cited in Dabscheck 1995: 59; April 1989 Economic Statement.

[22]   Part of the explanation for this may be that in general employers not in the metal industry face less well organised unions at the workplace level.

for wage rises grew.

Under this second SEP decision, wage increases depended on union and employer agreement to "fundamental[ly] review" their awards, "to improve the efficiency of industry and provide workers with access to more varied, fulfilling and better paid jobs" (Print H9100: 21).[23] The AIRC believed the "structural efficiency principle must increase flexibility by changing employment conditions, work patterns, employee mobility, education and training", suggesting support for a post-Fordist type strategy involving work 'upskilling' (Print H9100: 7). It also determined a minimum rate for metal and building industry tradespersons, indicating a range of relativities for key grades in the metal, transport, and storeman and packers' awards (AIRC Print H9100: 12-13), and that "other classifications throughout awards should be set in ... relation to these rates on the basis of relative skill, responsibility and the conditions under which the particular work is normally performed" (AIRC Print H9100: 12).[24]

The AIRC award restructuring decisions simultaneously supported contrasting approaches. In recommending a relationship between awards, the AIRC rejected arguments that such links hinder enterprise specific 'needs'. The minimum rates adjustment made some move to improve the relative position of lower paid workers, to some extent rejecting views that AIRC decisions must be framed only with an eye to their asserted economic effects. In these respects the AIRC implicitly rejected notions that enterprises need radical industrial relations deregulation, or that workplace productivity primarily relates to costs, also indicated by the AIRC's recommendation that changes "should not be approached in a negative cost-cutting manner" (Print H9100: 11). In other respects AIRC award restructuring decisions lent support to more restricted views of productivity determination and appropriate employee management in the late 1980s, with the list of matters recommended for negotiation in its second SEP decision (Print H9100: 10) largely about reducing costs associated with employing workers.

3.5 Approaches to Award Restructuring

The AIRC's award restructuring decisions incorporated different approaches to industrial relations and workplace change. At one extreme reducing labour costs was the focus, while at the other altering work organisation, skill formation and training provisions were priorities. For Curtain and Mathews the promise of award restructuring was "a skilled and adaptable workforce", potentially superseding

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23   The increases were $10 a week for bottom level workers; $12.50 for semi-skilled workers; and $15, or three per cent, whichever was greater, for tradespeople or the equivalent (Print H9100: 20). Two increases of this amount were possible applying from when an award was changed, not from the National Wage Case decision. The second increase could not occur less than six months after the first, and a union needed to apply to the AIRC to get it.

24   Unions had to apply to the AIRC for each of four separate increases, with at least a six months between each application. Pay increases could not be in addition to existing overaward payments (AIRC Print H9100: 21).

Taylorist practices of narrow job classification, tasks related to technologies, wages related to tasks performed, and training concentrated early in working lives (1990: 61-62). They conceded, however, that Taylorist labour routines may continue. The outcomes of award restructuring would be shaped by the attitudes of employers and unions, implying recognition that work changes would not simply be determined by technology or market characteristics. Case study research could inform understanding award restructuring outcomes by investigating the policies of particular employers and unions, and the influence of each on work and industrial relations developments.

Curtain and Mathews categorised possible policies under award restructuring with two "ideal types": 'cost minimisation', relating pay to productivity and tasks performed, and increasing job tasks with negligible extension of formal training; and 'productivity enhancement', increasing workforce skills to improve productivity (1990: 65). In this model work skills are not conceptualised in task specific or enterprise specific terms. Formal training is increased. Pay increments are related to demonstrated skill competence rather than task performance. Workers are given more scope to exercise deeper work knowledge by greater involvement in solving production problems. This involves management changing its practice, moving away from hierarchical and segmented mass production to post-Fordist principles of work organisation, skill formation and industrial relations.

3.5.1 Employer Responses to Award Restructuring

Employer and employer association approaches to award restructuring varied. Although they generally supported more enterprise level negotiations, employers differed about the role for the AIRC. Employers in the resources, agriculture and small business sectors generally wanted less AIRC regulation of work, while the MTIA supported the existing industrial relations institutional framework. It was not unexpected that the MTIA "enthusiastically embarked on negotiations to restructure their awards" as award restructuring originated in the metal industry (Lansbury 1990: 23). Although the MTIA in 1989-90 supported enterprise level bargaining to increase workplace flexibility over working hours, leave arrangements and training procedures (Wright 1990) (suggesting less interest in a highly trained and skilled workforce than implied in the productivity enhancing approach), it wanted the AIRC to retain a role in determining work conditions as it would restrain wage demands. In transport, small employers claimed that large companies accommodated Transport Workers Union demands, thereby restricting labour 'flexibilities' (Bray 1992). Large employers accepted changes to procedural matters resulting from award restructuring, and the union argued that functional flexibility was already extensive in this industry characterised by strong competition.

Many employers opposed the ACTU's Blueprint for award restructuring (see

below), particularly its relating conditions between awards, as this did not permit industry and enterprise specific requirements (Deery and Plowman 1991: 421). The BCA and the Confederation of Australian Industry (CAI)[25] supported enterprise level determination of employment regulation and opposed the AIRC system of award changes. Respondents to a CAI member survey (in 1991) believed award restructuring progressed slowly and that the most likely factors to increase productivity were increased daily work hours, reduced penalty rates, and extending ordinary work hours to all days, cancelling penalty rates for weekend work (Sword 1992: 262). For such employers increased labour flexibility and productivity were much influenced by labour costs, sometimes criticised as a 'traditional' approach to employee management: "Many employers see a 'flexible' workforce as being equivalent to a servile workforce. Others may see restructuring as a cost-cutting exercise and nothing more" (Macken 1989: 115). Australian managements, such as the respondents to the 1991 CAI member survey, tend to focus on labour costs when aiming for improved work efficiency. Such an approach is quite different to one of increasing employee skills, characteristic of post-Fordism.

3.5.2 Union Approaches to Award Restructuring

The most influential award restructuring strategy, it has been argued, was that of the Metal Workers Union (Macken 1989). In this union the dominant view was that a more skilled workforce was necessary as new technologies spread through workplaces. In this view, award restructuring aimed to develop such a workforce, bringing a major change to the metal industry, seen as having a tradition of a highly segmented, Taylorist division of work. In modern workplaces workers would need to perform a wider range of tasks, but this was hindered by the existing award, structured around the detailed division of labour.

The overall unions' strategy for award restructuring was indicated by a special unions' conference in February 1989 where unions adopted the *ACTU Blueprint For Changing Awards and Agreements*. This rejected the cost-cutting exercises characteristic of the two tier wage decision (DIR, April 1990: 3) and identified three broad aims for award restructuring:

> First, Raise the minimum rate in minimum rates awards to ensure that the restructuring is on an equitable base (Minimum Rate).
> Second, Broadbanding by establishing across industry six to eight skill levels (The Framework).
> Third, Provide the means by which upward mobility occurs through education, training and service (The career structure).

These principles offered promise to improve employment for workers 'stuck' in low

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25   In the early 1990s it became the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI).

paid jobs by addressing major inequities in Australia's wages determination and workforce training systems (Ewer *et al.* 1991). Award restructuring could include both greater recognition of informally gained work skills and widening access to formal training for workers, particularly women and migrants, who had suffered systematically from their work skills not being 'codified' in awards and from limited access to formal training. Many unions wanted greater worker access to training to improve career and job prospects, create a more skilled workforce and more rewarding work organisation.

This vision included making workplaces more democratic by increasing employee participation in workplace decision making. Award restructuring encouraged union endorsed, structured workplace consultative committees with employee representatives, who were also workplace union representatives.[26] Some employers also introduced initiatives through the 1980s to increase communication with workers through various involvement schemes that tended to avoid unions. The nature and significance of the different forms of participation no doubt varied. Are they about increasing employee 'involvement' in making decisions, or more about giving that impression? Are such structures designed to increase employee participation in solving production problems, give workers scope to develop independent evaluation of management agendas, and gain employee support for workplace changes? Without specific training and information to back up worker representatives in such forums, they are more likely to be management dominated. In some cases management used them to convey bad news to employees, reducing employee disaffection.[27] More 'genuine' consultative processes might be expected in post-Fordist industrial relations.

A different view of the union movement's approach to award restructuring, advanced by Costa and Duffy (1991), is that aiming to maintain manufacturing industry in Australia is unrealistic and part of an ideological, socialist strategy.[28] This is inimical to Australia's real interests as a supplier of commodities (raw materials and agricultural products) to the world market. This view underrates the significance of other industries such as manufacturing, retail/wholesale trade, finance and insurance, which are more important proportionately in Australia's economy.[29] Costa and Duffy argue that award restructuring increased national regulation of the labour market, agreeing with Plowman that the AIRC's in-principle adoption of the 'blueprint'

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[26]   Callus et al. (1991, Table 9.8: 198) indicates that 17 per cent of workplace (with at least 20 employees) introduced consultative/employee participation arrangements after the 1987 REP; 15 per cent of private and 24 per cent of public workplaces.

[27]   Chris Lloyd, former Metals and Engineering Workers Union official, reports this (*Broadside Weekly*, September 16, 1992).

[28]   Both were employees of the Labor Council of NSW.

[29]   For instance the *Business Review Weekly*, (October 22, 1993: 7) top 100 companies in Australia (by revenue and employment) were manufacturing (the largest group: 35); then wholesale trade (14) and retailers (8). From 1988 net profits after tax in resources fell 20 per cent; in manufacturing they increased by over 22 per cent. Just four resource companies are in the largest 100 companies .

approach to award restructuring was "little more than an exercise in comparative wage justice" (1990a: 22). Plowman's view, that the AIRC award restructuring approach hindered greater enterprise flexibility by not disrupting award relativities, thereby possibly giving "more rigid wage structures" (1990a: 24), seems premature and based on the limited view that flexibility primarily meant increasing management's ability to vary employment conditions.

This section discussed the major industrial relations parties' approaches to award restructuring, indicating significant differences between employers and unions over award restructuring aims, industrial relations and work changes. It also identified different employer approaches to award restructuring and to the centralised industrial relations system. The employer focus on reducing labour costs contrasted with the shift in union strategy in the three years to 1989, "from a concern with shop floor militancy and decentralized, over-award wage bargaining to the need to foster strategic unionism through structural change" (Timo 1989: 400). It might be argued that the union strategy move to a more conciliatory approach was evident in the Accord process from 1983.

The next section discusses the early progress of award restructuring to assess its relevance to enterprises. It has been suggested above that many employers seemed less interested in post-Fordist production organisation than 'traditional' concerns with labour costs, although through the 1980s employer interest in employee participation increased. That such management initiatives are new has been challenged (Wright 1995). Empirical study is necessary to a full analysis of the practical application of award restructuring.

3.6 Award Restructuring: Early Progress

Part of the debate about award restructuring occurred around its workplace implementation and significance to company operations. A group of case studies of award restructuring and industrial relations change in manufacturing, the public sector and private services sector until May 1991, generally supported the view that award restructuring assisted creating more efficient workplaces (Curtain, Gough and Rimmer 1992).[30] The Government believed the research showed that "award restructuring ... [was] a vital element in an organisation's strategy to survive".[31] However, even in these selected cases the outcomes of award restructuring varied.

Significantly, all the case studies (thirty-three) had attained the two pay increases available under the 1989 National Wage Case Decision, distinguishing them

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[30]   *Progress at the Workplace. Workplace Reform and Award Restructuring. An Overview*, AGPS. Along with this overview volume there are three others, one each on the Public Sector (with eight case studies), Manufacturing (twenty case studies, but six not published) and Private Sector Services (five cases), published as a report to the DIR.

[31]   Foreword to the Overview volume of these studies by then Federal Minister for Industrial Relations, Senator Cook.

from many workers (in one estimate for WA, up to a half) who had not.[32] The AIRC accepted that these cases were improving productivity and jobs, and restructuring their awards, although even in these companies industrial relations change was seen as slow and incomplete. Other areas of the economy had more difficulty gaining pay increases from award restructuring, suggesting its progress varied and that it was not universally relevant. In the report it is argued that in these case studies, manufacturing and public sector "[s]urvival relies on the adoption of microeconomic reforms with respect to products, production systems and markets" and these "were closely tied to related workforce problems", while services did not experience the same "workforce problems" of skill deficiencies, multi-unionism, demarcation, adversarial attitudes, staff instability and excessive staffing levels (Curtain, Gough and Rimmer 1992: 2).

This report claimed management supported workplace consultation and work organisation change, differing from an earlier report that criticised management for a short term approach to workforce issues and limited commitment to industrial relations and work change (Rimmer and Verevis 1990). However, the later report also conceded that management blocked desirable workplace change. Other hindrances to 'necessary' work change included employee and union distrust and resistance, contributed to by "widely and expeditiously implemented" job cuts, in about half the manufacturing and all the public sector cases (Curtain et al: 1992: 3-4). This report also recognised employer resistance to increasing training expenditure, implying little employer interest in greater worker skills. Curtain *et al.* argued, however, that organisation survival relied on developing "smaller, better trained, more flexible, and less adversarial enterprise workforces" (1992: 23).[33] Award changes reduced classifications and demarcation; increased multi-skilling and career paths; and improved training provisions, suggesting a productivity enhancement strategy. Curtain *et al.* (1992: 3) claimed that "management remained generally committed to such changes".

Manufacturing enterprises faced a number of production process and market problems and Curtain *et al.* opined that ordinarily management initiates measures to resolve these problems (1992: 16), contrasting with other analyses of workforce problems for which the "main agenda ..[of] Award Restructuring (especially multi-skilling and improved training)" seemed relevant (1992: 23). As noted above, workforce problems were seen as less critical in private services, with more 'flexible' employment arrangements enabling greater management prerogative to deploy labour as required. Of the private services sector, only in road transport was unionism strong: "Elsewhere management had enjoyed a free hand which facilitated key flexibilities"

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[32]   The Secretary of the WA Trades and Labor Council complained that at August 1990 *half* of workers covered by WA State awards had not received any pay increases from the 1989 National Wage Case (Thompson 1992: 52).

[33]   Those left out of the smaller workforces might question the worth of such reforms.

(Curtain et al: 1992: 22). Most of the successful cases in this study were considered to have "integrated workplace reform with advances in both technology and management methods" and the reforms included multi-skilling, job redesign, greater training, reduced demarcations, more workplace specific work classifications and job evaluation (Curtain et al: 1992: 31). New management techniques included Total Quality Control, Total Quality Management, Value Added Management and Just-In-Time.

Curtain *et al.* (1992: 31) argued that in some companies studied, recent workplace reform clearly improved productivity, although job loss was often an important feature. The report's emphasis on award restructuring seems to understate other management initiatives (such as workforce reductions), insufficiently recognise management's influence over firm performance and that labour is only one determinant of productivity (Burgess 1989). These case studies suggest various responses to award restructuring across sectors and companies. Award restructuring did not affect all sectors of the economy equally.[34]

3.6.1 Feminist Criticism of Restructuring

One strand of criticism of the union Accord and award restructuring strategies has been that they benefit some workers more than others, especially men more than women. Some emphasise that award restructuring emanated from the male dominated metal manufacturing sector, which has different characteristics to sectors of the economy dominated by women.[35] In the metals industry, award restructuring aimed to change the workforce to perform broader tasks, limited previously by demarcated classifications. As McCreadie puts it, "feminist critics query the current preoccupation with the tradeable goods sector and the consequent neglect of the economic contribution made by more feminised areas such as the services, community and public sectors" (1989: 12). Men's work is recognised by many more award classifications than apply to women's work, and even in the goods sector the awards applying to many women workers, for instance machinists in the textile, clothing and footwear industries, do not recognise the work skills of already multi-skilled women workers. There is much less pay differentiation for women than men workers in, say, the metal award (McCreadie 1989: 13).

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[34]   Richard Curtain, (1992: 12) in a paper discussing employment practices, says the AWIRS data indicate that new career paths had been introduced in 34 per cent of workplaces from early 1987. AWIRS (Callus et al. 1991: Table 9.8, 198) says 30 per cent of all workplaces had introduced new career paths; 23 per cent of private workplaces and 48 per cent of public workplaces. (Data based on survey responses of workplaces with at least 20 employees, which is the sample Curtain uses in his analysis.) This suggests that the public sector has had more interest in award restructuring than the private sector, to the extent that is taken to refer to broader regulation changes than a focus on cost-cutting initiatives.

[35]   Examples of this analysis include McCreadie (1989: 12-14), Donaldson (1991: 107-108), Sharp and Broomhill (1988: 88), Henry and Franzway (1993). Also noted by Lepani and Williams (1991). Sharp and Broomhill argue that gender inequality in the labour market is not addressed by the trade and industry strategies of *Australia Reconstructed* (1988: 88).

Awards embodying a gendered definition of skill contribute to women's secondary labour force experience. They recognise skills credentialled by the training system, to which women have had limited access, and downplay women's informally gained skills. In the main, awards give more recognition of work skills in traditional male jobs in industries with a history of union organisation. Women are disadvantaged by tending to be in less unionised sectors with less access to formal training (Henry and Franzway 1993: 135). The model of structured training concentrated at the beginning of a working life applies less to women than men. For many women workers to gain from award restructuring it needed to identify the range of skills they already used to give "recognition of the complexity and variety of skills already involved" (Donaldson 1991: 107) and construct award structures that rewarded work skills with pay rates commensurate to those in male-dominated awards. In such circumstances award restructuring needed to achieve the opposite of what was desired for male manufacturing workers.

However, only in some sectors are employment practices changing to provide workers with career paths and more skilled jobs (Henry and Franzway 1993: 134). Primary in the labour market has been "the decline in award coverage in the private sector and the huge growth in the female-dominated marginal workforce" (Bennett 1992: 430).[36] Recent increases in part-time, lower paid and less secure employment, now up to one third of the workforce, suggest workforce polarisation and employer avoidance of award conditions to minimise labour costs (Stewart 1992). This seems inconsistent with the post-Fordist view of contemporary industrial relations change.

Award restructuring offered potential to improve the position of working women by incorporating in awards gender neutral skill definitions based on competency rather than time served. Some recent trends in the labour market reduce this prospect. Ewer *et al.* (1991) argue that award restructuring did not and would not achieve its potential, fundamentally because it relied on the Australian industrial relations system in the face of strong employer opposition and trade union divergence over commitment to facilitating a high skill workforce. Notably, Bennett (1992) argues, contrary to those implying that the AIRC imposes uniform conditions across the economy (such as Drago, Wooden and Sloan 1992), that the AIRC is *flexible* in its application of the work-value principle, resulting in inequitable recognition of work.[37]

The case studies following this chapter add empirical information on award

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[36]   Bennett cites one estimate that "a third of the workforce can be found in marginal employment as part-timers, casuals, homeworkers or the 'self-employed' " (1992: 430). Full-time 'male' jobs have decreased and 'female' part-time jobs increased (Stewart 1992: 52). In Australia part-time workers are predominantly women (Deery and Plowman 1991: 483, cite ABS data showing around 40 per cent of women are part-time workers, compared to about 7 per cent of men).

[37]   Bennett argues the flexibility of the AIRC in this regard partly explains the failure of the cases for equal pay presented before the Commission by the Council of Action for Equal Pay. Over the years the comparative wage justice doctrine generally maintained existing relativities between work classifications, within and between awards, largely established in the early operation of the system (Deery and Plowman 1991: 388-391).

restructuring's implementation, the nature of workplace and industrial relations change, exploring differences between two workplace types and whether award restructuring (especially as conceived as contributing to post-Fordist workplaces) seems more relevant to men's than women's employment. The case studies for this study are of a public sector, white collar, office work setting, with a relatively high number of women workers, and a manufacturing industry sector, predominantly with male workers. These public sector women workers are more highly unionised and their workplaces more centralised than women workers in private services sectors generally. This workplace research gives some insight into whether 'cost minimisation' and 'productivity enhancement' initiatives are mutually exclusive within individual workplaces.

3.7 Conclusion

Through the 1980s, many parties involved in Australian industrial relations agreed the labour regulation system needed changing, but disagreed over what those changes should be. There was some agreement that greater enterprise level determination of work arrangements was desirable, but visions of enterprise bargaining differed substantially. The ALP supported the AIRC, maintaining its role in 'establishing' minimum employment conditions, while the Liberals and National Party wanted centralised regulation of employment by industrial tribunals cut back.

In one view, by the early 1990s the Australian industrial relations community agreed that "the award system and its protection of occupationally-based unionism enhances neither productivity nor democracy in the workplace" and thus needed overhaul (Drago, Wooden and Sloan 1992: 7). This asserted consensus indicated a significant change from the mid 1980s when it was widely accepted that the existing system could meet the demands of a changing world economy. Through the later 1980s, Australia's industrial relations system increased its focus on the enterprise. That system's linking of wages and inflation was wound back, as from 1986 productivity increasingly became the predominant articulated concern. Through the 1980s and into the 1990s the AIRC set the parameters of enterprise or workplace level negotiations within a modified, centralised framework. This evolution of the Australian industrial relations system has been termed 'managed decentralism'.[38]

When looking at industrial relations change it is pertinent to appreciate employer differences, such as over the extent of industrial relations 'reform'. Some prefer the benefits of Accord-type wage restraint and co-operative industrial relations compared to dealing with a workforce politicised by deregulated industrial relations. If the AIRC were no longer part of determining working conditions, doubtless some

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[38]   The term is attributed to a 1989 piece by Macdonald and Rimmer on wages and award restructuring (Curtain 1990: 447).

unions and workers would be more assertive, possibly raising the incidence of industrial disputes. For employers with unionised workers, higher wages are likely where direct bargaining has more influence over pay, but employers with less assertive workers would be more able, under deregulated industrial relations, to implement their desired workplace changes.

This chapter discussed the development of award restructuring (called 'structural efficiency' in the industrial relations system), central to the last Federal Government's industrial relations agenda. That Government's view was that "progress under structural efficiency across a spectrum of awards has been considerable", although it admitted varied outcomes (DIR 1991: 61). The case studies mentioned above suggest that the objective of using award restructuring to create a more skilled workforce, and thereby raise productivity, was not universally followed by employers, among whom there seemed more interest in minimising costs associated with employment (such as by retrenching workers and not increasing vocational training expenditure). 'Post-Fordist workplaces', with more skilled workers and more collaborative industrial relations, do not appear widely applicable.

In the late 1980s, the AIRC permitted greater industrial relations flexibility than claimed by critics who argue the system did not allow enterprise specific work arrangements (Drago *et al.* 1992). However, reducing the role of Australia's industrial relations institutions in work regulation would probably see many employers focus more on cutting labour associated costs than on developing post-Fordist work organisation and industrial relations, thereby encouraging lower, not higher, productivity jobs, contrary to the expectations of optimistic post-Fordism. Empirical research would aid understanding the circumstances in which particular strategies were pursued.

The following case studies look at award restructuring with a focus on recent changes to work organisation and industrial relations and the support (from employers, workers and unions) for increasing employee skill. Some recent instances of work organisation change include greater task variety and more interest in workers' production process insights, reducing the Taylorist hierarchical division of labour. However, developments that appear non-Taylorist should not conceal other workplace initiatives. The evident priority of labour cost to many employers and increasing 'atypical' jobs suggests limited employer interest in the vision of a new work organisation based on more skilled and autonomous employees.

PART TWO: CASE STUDIES

Chapter Four: Australian Taxation Office: Consultation and Job Redesign

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a case study of award restructuring and workplace change in a large federal public sector organisation. It differs in several ways from my second case study of workplaces in timber manufacturing, but there are similarities, especially in that they have been seen as implementing the award restructuring agenda of 'upskilling' workplace reform. In this research the central issues were: was work being up-skilled, were workplace industrial relations becoming more co-operative and democratic, and has significant work change been associated with award restructuring? These questions were asked of late 1980s, early 1990s Australian industrial relations, when award restructuring was a central industrial issue.

The focus on work and industrial relations change in the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) through the late 1980s and early 1990s contrasts with industrial sociology's traditional concern with manufacturing and, more generally, market sector jobs (Coombs and Jonsson 1991: 90).[1] 'White-collar' office work, as in the ATO, is clearly different to metal industry 'blue-collar' trades work where award restructuring originated (although, as shown below, a perceived need for change in the Australian Public Service [APS] predated the AIRC and wider labour movement's promotion of award restructuring). Female and male employees are more equal numerically in the ATO (although highly segmented by gender, reflecting Australia's wider labour market) than in manufacturing, where there are more males.[2] The ATO case permits empirical study of the relevance of award restructuring to a non-manufacturing area where the employees are not overwhelmingly male. The tendency of Australian industrial awards to demarcate men's work in more detail than women's had

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[1]   Glenda Maconachie (1993) makes a similar point in her report of a study of employment officers in the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES): that the focus on blue collar manufacturing workers has tended to neglect trends affecting white-collar workers.

[2]   In June 1982 women were 43 per cent of ATO employees and in June 1994 48 per cent (ATO *Annual Reports*). With the important caveat that women manufacturing workers are concentrated in the clothing industry (in August 1991 women were 71.3 per cent of the clothing and footwear workforce ABS 1994, table 3), more men than women are manufacturing workers: in February 1993 there were 800,300 male and 304,600 female manufacturing employees (ABS 1993 Cat. No. 6203.0).

implications for various groups' award restructuring aims. Generally, 'broadbanding' (to create less specialised, more varied jobs) was more applicable to men than women employees (from the employers' view), as many women already used a range of usually unrecognised skills in their jobs (McCreadie 1989).

It is pertinent to consider public sector work in analyses of employment as it constitutes a sizeable proportion of employment. In Australia, about thirty per cent of employees are in the various levels of the public sector (Deery and Plowman 1991: 84). Public sector work has been seen as having superior conditions (such as better employment security) compared to private sector work, thereby setting employment standards, but changes from the 1980s imposed greater fiscal restraint on public sectors, reducing staff and the advantages of government employment, especially in Western industrialised societies (Fairbrother 1994).[3] In Australia, ALP Governments sought to check public spending growth, using management strategies such as devolution and 'outsourcing', although worker oriented policies, like minimum working conditions and consulting unions, also influenced ALP Governments, more than most other governments of English speaking Western countries. Award restructuring was an important element of ALP policy, aiming for a high-skill, high-wage workforce.

The Hawke Government's encouragement of 'employee participation', including in the Federal public sector, was significant to the 1980s ATO. It became a leader in 'employee participation' and it was reported to have a new career structure, more rewarding jobs and changed industrial relations.[4] This chapter assesses award restructuring's impact on ATO employees and jobs, and comments on ATO industrial relations change. Was award restructuring 'relevant' for the ATO? Were more career opportunities, greater demands on worker skills and more rewarding jobs created? Was industrial democracy furthered?

Mathews (1992a: 169-170) argues that service organisations, for instance the ATO, are adopting 'world best practices' developed by modern manufacturers. For Mathews, from the mid 1980s the ATO aimed to be a 'lean production' service organisation. It "pioneered a totally new conception of its role", based on a 'new' view of taxpayers that they would meet their tax obligations as long as they saw them as fair (Mathews 1992a: 171). He argues this was the prelude to the ATO's new approach to employees, also related to its changed view of how to use new technologies. Rather than using information technologies to impose 'authoritarian' discipline on employees (as with surveillance or automation, which the ATO did in the early 1980s), the ATO began using new technologies to enhance the "capacities of the front-line service deliverer" (1992a: 170-1). Learning from best practice

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3   This pressure increased public sector service delivery efficiency (Wanna et al. 1992).

4   A supervisor suggested the ATO could be interesting for these reasons, also reported in the literature, eg: Curtain (1993) and Mathews (1992a).

manufacturing, in the 1990s the ATO developed "client-centred, complete cycle cells" (1992a: 172), organising its workforce in teams to handle all Tax Office interaction with specific groups of taxpayers. Underlying this strategy was "socio-technical" theory, using the organisation's employees, through representatives and direct participation, to develop production (Mathews 1992a: 171).[5]

I argue that ATO work and industrial changes resulted not only from AIRC sanctioned award restructuring but from several influences, including new technologies and operating rationale changes. This case tests the cogency of applying 'optimistic post-Fordism' to the ATO, implied by Mathews describing the ATO as a 'lean' and 'learning' services organisation (1992a). The research method is described first. ATO background is then discussed, followed by an outline of award restructuring in the Australian Public Service (APS) and the ATO, leading into analysing the implementation of award restructuring and evaluating work reorganisation and job redesign, followed by a concluding discussion of the applicability of post-Fordism to the ATO.

4.2 Research Method

The workplace research for this chapter was conducted at the Adelaide Branch Office of the ATO, from 1991 to 1993. I used a case study approach of interviewing a range of participants and examining various documentary materials. The aims included exploring employee responses to award restructuring. Apart from resource considerations, workers in the ATO (such as Interview C) suggested that employee participation in a survey would probably be limited because of several management initiated surveys in the late 1980s (measuring employee motivation). I had discussions with employees, attended Branch union delegate meetings, a two-day union seminar, and conducted semi-structured extended interviews with ten Adelaide ATO employees and a union official, a format allowing those interviewed to expand on their views of work and industrial relations change.[6] Two factors compensated for this relatively small number of interviews. Firstly, the research focussed on an area of the office (Returns Processing, later Returns Service) where award restructuring significantly affected work. Those interviewed were directly involved in award restructuring and its associated job redesign. Secondly, employees interviewed were from across the Administrative Service Officer (ASO) structure, ranging from level 2 (level 1 is the lowest) to managers, and were ATO employees for three to thirty years. This 'cross-section' of views permitted matching and comparing of information. Also, some employees were 'specialists': a manager of the Adelaide Office's piloting of the Electronic Lodgement Service (ELS); an occupational health and safety officer; and an

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5   More discussion of this, and post-Fordism, in the thesis Conclusion.

6   These were one to one and a half hours, taped and transcribed.

equal employment opportunity officer. I interviewed a union official and had discussions with union officials and ATO union delegates. This range provided various perspectives on ATO changes, although the extent to which they represented opinions of all ATO employees was not tested statistically. Figure 4.1 shows the range of ATO people interviewed.

Figure 4.1 Australian Taxation Office Interviews (May - September 1992)

Interview	Level	Gender	Years at ATO/ particular roles
Interview A	ASO 4	female	nearly 10
Interview B	ASO 2	female	6
Interview C	ASO 6	female	3; EEO Officer
Interview D	ASO 2	male	6
Interview E	-	male	9; OSI co-ordinator (union nominee)
Interview F	na	male	PSU organiser, Adelaide ATO
Interview G	Manager	male	involved with new projects
Interview H	ASO 4	female	8; Occ. Health and Safety Adviser
Interview I	ASO 4	male	10; PSU health and safety rep.
Interview J	ASO 4	female	21; union delegate
Interview K	Manager	male	30

The interview focus was on how and whether award restructuring affected ATO work organisation. What was award restructuring and did it change work organisation? Had work skills increased? Had other factors influenced work organisation? Had functional flexibility increased? Consultation by management with employees and their representatives was another important aspect of change in the ATO. How did ATO employees, from various levels, evaluate consultative practices? Along with interviews, ATO documents, such as its *Annual Reports, Corporate Plans*, and other internal documents (such as reports by working parties on the implementation of award restructuring in the Adelaide ATO's main processing area), were used, as well as public reports into ATO operations by Committees of the Federal Parliament, and other reported research of the ATO.

4.3 Industrial Relations Background

Work conditions became a significant industrial issue in the early 1980s ATO, particularly for keyboard operators. Management developed ideas about altering work organisation to reduce the existing work regime's negative influence on industrial relations and employee health. In 1983 the Tax Commissioner was concerned about industrial relations tensions, noting "a marked increase in activity by staff

associations" (meaning industrial action, Commissioner of Taxation 1983 *Annual Report:* 4).[7] He also implied management recognition of work environment problems, noting continuing studies of ergonomic needs.[8]

In mid 1984 Trevor Boucher was appointed Commissioner of Taxation. In his first year he initiated a training procedures review and a "fundamental enquiry into the assessment process", observing that in other countries self-assessment allowed tax administration to concentrate on "selective post-assessment" (Commissioner of Taxation 1984: 9). Also at this time the major unions covering APS office-based work 'pushed' for Government support of a wage claim, subsequently rejected by the AIRC (Simms 1987: 43-44).[9] The unions responded with strike action. Strained industrial relations, particularly in the ATO, continued through 1985, with a bitter dispute over repetitive strain injury (RSI).[10] Dealing with RSI and the pay claim coincided with various Hawke Government changes to the Federal public service, restraining government expenditure.[11] Mathews argues that the RSI dispute showed both the Commonwealth and unions "that there must be a better way of utilising the new Information Technology" (1992a: 3).

4.3.1 The Australian Taxation Office in the mid 1980s

Widespread public perceptions of bureaucratic inefficiency and large scale tax avoidance in the early 1980s influenced the new ALP Government's approach to the ATO. Public inquiries into the ATO in the mid 1980s included the 1986 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Expenditure[12] that criticised labour intensive processing and "called for drastic upgrading of the ATO's computer facilities; for a complete rethink of its strategic directions (eg away from assessment towards audit); for a total review of its work organisation and methods; and a rethink (together with the government) of the approach to tax collection, focussing on the feasibility of imposing a withholding tax on interest paid" (Mathews 1992a: 21). Over the decade to 1984, ATO employees increased by one quarter compared to seven per cent across the

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[7]   He claimed that consultation resolved many disputes, but two required arbitration. In one, keystroke rates for data processing operators were reduced (Commissioner of Taxation 1983: 4). Mathews (1992a), at the time Victorian Trades Hall's Occupational Health and Safety Officer, was asked to visit the Melbourne ATO data processing section and describes a scene of regimented rows of keyboard operators.

[8]   In 1982 Commissioner O'Reilly noted that adjustable chairs were acquired in part to develop more ergonomic work stations, but that suitable tables were as yet unavailable (Commissioner of Taxation 1982: 6).

[9]   The Administrative and Clerical Officers' Association (ACOA) presented market survey evidence to the ACAC in December 1984 showing that public servant pay rates had fallen behind the private sector.

[10]   The Federated Clerks Union (Tax Office Branch, FCU(TOB) pursued the case legally. A PSU (Public Sector Union) official said there was a lot of conflict in the ATO around the RSI issue, and that the "FCU (TOB) committed $100,000 to a court case as a test case" (Interview July 1992). One of the outcomes was solidarity among the women keyboard operators. Mathews (1992a: 3) says this court action saw the union "almost bankrupting itself".

[11]   Further indication that the ALP Government did not simply follow the dictates of its supposed union masters.

[12]   Reported in Mathews 1992a: 20-25. The Committee's report was entitled, *A Taxing Problem*. Also discussed by employees interviewed.

APS, implying substandard ATO performance (Mathews 1992a: 22).[13] The ATO claimed it needed extra staff to cope with growing tax avoidance.

Changing the ATO became increasingly important. New tax collection methods and information technologies, including automation, had significant work organisation implications. The ATO introduced self assessment, excepting superannuation funds, in the year to July 1987, effectively requiring taxpayers to do tasks previously performed in the ATO, 'freeing up' ATO staff (Mathews 1992a: 26-27).[14] Assisting taxpayers to complete tax returns and assessing targeted taxpayers replaced evaluating all returns. Award restructuring could complement these technological, operation strategy and work organisation changes by redefining jobs to fit the changing work requirements.

4.3.2 Work Classification Change

Much ATO work was hierarchically segmented and extensively divided until the work organisation and job redesign changes begun in the mid 1980s, although during the 1970s there were some employee participation experiments in the APS, including in the ATO where semi-autonomous work groups were set up and some limited job re-design linked to work measurement, but without formal union participation (Teicher 1996: 117). Many jobs had a very limited task range.[15] Processing tax returns, central to the ATO, was organised in a similar way to Fordist production lines.[16] Altering award arrangements covering office-based work interested both management and unions. For management, numerous award classifications restricted staff functionally. Management wanted less award structure rigidity (Selby Smith 1989) and fewer management levels. Unions saw the potential for more rewarding jobs.

Negotiations addressing award restructuring of APS office-based work covered a protracted period (Selby Smith 1989). Word processing was introduced in the 1970s and early 1980s. The Public Service Board (PSB), which classified jobs,

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[13]   In 1984 there were almost 16,000 ATO employees. Over the ten years to June 1991, APS employees increased 7.5 per cent, about half the percentage increase in Australia's population. As a ratio of Australia's total civilian workforce, APS employees fell from 3 per cent to 2.5 per cent from 1979 to December 1990 (Public Service Commission 1992: 7). Changing policy priorities over time altered Government department employee demands, making it difficult to predict APS department employee number changes.

[14]   In total 1,245 assessing staff were redeployed to other tasks, the largest number, 864, transferring to Audit, nearly 300 to clerical examination of tax returns and nearly 100 to tax-payer service (Mathews 1992a: 27). Interestingly the November 1993 Joint Committee of Public Accounts' *Report No. 326 An Assessment of Tax*, notes that self assessment has *increased* the costs of compliance for taxpayers.

[15]   Mathews (1992a: 45-6) says that of the 17,000 ATO staff at the time, 6,000 were in the bottom clerical level and 2,500 more were in the next level. 1,700 keyboard operators only did keying. According to the ATO (*1986-87 Annual Report*: 33), at June 30 1987 there were over 5,000 clerical staff and a similar number of assistants, in a total staff of 17,847 (17,158 permanent full-time).

[16]   This comparison was made by various ATO employees interviewed in this research. It is also used by writers on the ATO (Mathews 1992a, Teicher 1992a), and in ATO documents on job redesign during award restructuring, recalling Braverman's critique of the deskilling of white collar work in the twentieth century.

began reviewing keyboard and typist award structures in February 1983.[17] The 1984 Hawke Government public sector reforms increased union participation in classifying employees. Further changes in July 1987 disbanded the PSB and divided office work restructuring among the new Public Service Commission (PSC), the Department of Finance (DoF) and the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) (Selby Smith 1989).[18] Departmental heads gained authority over classifying positions, giving agencies and departments more scope to match their staff and operational needs. Through the 1980s APS agencies also sought "greater flexibility to mix keyboard and clerical work" (Selby Smith 1989: 204), hindered by the existing award structure and work organisation.

4.3.3 Classification Structure and APS/ATO Unions

The award classification structure influenced ATO union organisation. Three main unions covered APS office-based workers. Fourth Division APS employees (keyboard workers and clerical assistants) could join the Australian Public Service Association (APSA). The Administrative and Clerical Officers' Association (ACOA) covered Third Division employees: clerical and administrative officers, and the FCU(TOB) could cover all ATO employees. Most of its members were, however, from the most numerous Fourth Division (Teicher 1992a: 35).[19]

Work design changes associated with word processing complicated union demarcation. In the first half of the 1980s, the APS unions disagreed about staff classification and work organisation change. A fully integrated award structure worried APSA leaders, fearful of advancing ACOA amalgamation designs that could dilute their keyboard operator members' interests (Simms 1987: 45). ACOA had shown interest in amalgamation at its 1977 Federal Conference (Teicher 1990: 193). Some APSA leaders accused ACOA of being the bosses' union, perhaps reflecting inter-union tensions and the perception that "APSA has traditionally been the ACOA's junior partner" (Simms 1987: 5).[20]

A common union view about re-classification took time to develop. In September 1985 the PSB indicated it preferred a classification structure encompassing the keyboard, clerical assistant and lower five grades of the clerical administrative

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[17]   By late 1984 the PSB had five options for restructuring classification of APS office-based work.

[18]   'Machinery of Government' changes followed the 1987 re-election of the Hawke Government. The DoF gained the former PSB role of controlling total staff numbers in government agencies. The new DIR had authority over Federal public sector pay, working conditions and industrial relations.

[19]   The First Division referred to Permanent Heads of Departments, a position replaced by Departmental Secretary in Hawke Government public service reforms. Second Division were senior managers who traditionally stayed with a department. A Senior Executive Service across the APS included this division, with the aim of establishing a strata of managerial expertise which was not department specific (Teicher 1990: 5-6).

[20]   Tucker (1992: 8) suggests that APSA saw amalgamation proposals as a takeover bid and Teicher (1990: 192-3) notes a long-standing antagonism between APSA and ACOA over increasing competition for members as work changes obscured the distinctions between employees.

structures (Selby Smith 1989: 205). ACOA and FCU(TOB) also supported a single award structure across the separate award streams by this time. APSA was wary, but in late 1986 its members voted support for an integrated award structure and possible ACOA merger (Selby Smith 1989: 206-207). In March 1987 the Government supported a fully integrated structure covering APS office-based work. Union responses varied. The FCU (TOB) wanted a training grade; APSA wanted seven or eight levels in the structure and ACOA was little concerned as its members were less affected than lower level employees. Through 1987 there were significant developments in APS office work classification. The unions came together in mid 1987 to negotiate with the PSB (Selby Smith 1989: 208-209), and more common ground developed between the unions and management.

4.4 APS Award Restructuring: Second Tier Wage Agreement

The Second Tier Wage Agreement, reached in November 1987 between the Government and the three unions, restructured awards covering APS office-based work and was ratified by the AIRC in December under the March 1987 National Wage Case restructuring and efficiency principle (REP). The three main award streams in APS office-based work were integrated: clerical administrative, clerical assistant and keyboard. The unions and DIR predicted nine and a half per cent salary savings over the coming three years, jointly presenting this to the AIRC (Selby-Smith 1989: 211-212). Paragraph 3 of the Agreement stipulated that a "single integrated office structure of 8 levels with 43 salary points" would replace about 100 separate classifications with around 180 distinct pay points. This required "extensive job and work redesign"; "improved management structures and practices"; "multi-skilling of staff with provision of adequate training"; and "broadbanding functions, jobs and classifications" (Paragraph 6), implying significant developments for APS office work.

Each APS department or agency would work with their unions to implement the changes within the Agreement's framework. In the ATO there were high levels of industrial relations tension in the early to mid 1980s related to ATO use of new technologies. From the mid 1980s the ATO became more consultative over introducing new information technologies. Its approach to award restructuring fitted its developing operational strategy based on a changing view of ATO work organisation and staff use (Mathews 1992a).

4.4.1 Pay Increases

Notably, the Agreement included various wage rises, with the largest percentage increases for lower classifications. The lowest grade clerical assistants, also called support staff, received an 11.9 per cent pay increase. More commonly the

increase for Administrative Service Officer (ASO) level 1 (most typists and keyboard operators) was around five per cent. For those in the new level 2, pay increases were between 3.8 and five per cent. The higher levels received increases of three per cent; four per cent was the average.[21] Larger percentage rises for lower level staff (disproportionately female) made some effort to reduce gender inequities in the ATO.[22]

4.4.2 Broad-banding and Multi-skilling: Cost Benefits

The Agreement claimed benefits for jobs and APS efficiency and productivity (Paragraph 24). Multi-skilling would increase employee flexibility and mobility. Workers could be moved according to demands on services, potentially giving more varied and interesting jobs and more prompt services delivery to the public. Changed management and supervision practice would reduce absenteeism and staff turnover. Improved staff morale would result in better service provision to the public.

For management, a single award structure would reduce demarcation problems and reduce costs. A broadbanded structure would reduce promotions as permanent staff would fill positions (Paragraph 24). Workers 'acting' in higher duty positions would fall. Broadbanding would reduce classification levels and promotions, thereby reducing promotions procedure appeals. Fewer classifications would cut salary administration costs.[23] Health and safety improvements from redesigned jobs would likely bring savings, for instance, disbanding dedicated keyboard jobs would reduce RSI.

4.4.3 Training Commitment

From the unions' view an important feature of the Agreement was that employees did not have to move to a new job "in a multi-skilled environment until they had been appropriately trained for the multi-skilled task or redesigned job" (Paragraph 13). Further: "The employer is committed to provide resources and appropriate training to facilitate multi-skilling and job redesign" (Paragraph 12), although this would be open to interpretation at the agency level. For the APS, the PSC would enter a short agreement with the unions covering "general training and staff development principles" (Paragraph 15). Individual agencies and unions would develop specific training agreements based on these principles. The APS service-wide agreements

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[21]   Source: ACOA's booklet to its members publicising and explaining the Second Tier Agreement contains a table of pay rates on page 10.

[22]   For instance, in 1988 women were two thirds (67.7 per cent) of ASO 1 employees, 63 per cent of ASO 2's, 46.8 per cent of ASO 3's and 36.8 per cent of ASO 4 level staff (Commissioner of Taxation 1989 *Annual Report 1988-89*: 139). At this time women were just less than half (49.4 per cent) of ATO staff.

[23]   Higher duties payments would be reduced significantly. Robson (in a letter, dated 21 December 1987, to all APS departments disputing DIR interpretations of the Second Tier Wage Agreement, published in a booklet to ACOA members detailing that Agreement) quotes a figure of 0.95 per cent, and Selby-Smith (1989: 211) quotes a figure of 1.12 per cent. They agreed that job redesign would reduce the salary budget by 0.86 per cent in the first year.

established a standard below which employment conditions would not fall.

4.4.4 Job Redesign: 'Whole Job Concept'

Under the Second Tier Agreement job redesign would occur across all APS agencies, a significant objective being to establish more rewarding jobs. The articulated principles embodied workers using various skills in a job, with tasks related in a meaningful way to make up a "complete piece of work".[24] Each job should:

> (i) have clear objectives and be complete in itself, combining a variety of tasks forming a coherent whole; (ii) constitute a significant contribution to the total function of the organisation which is understood by the worker; (iii) provide for problem solving, appropriate training and development and a reasonable degree of challenge; and (iv) allow for a degree of discretion and decision-making by the worker. (See previous footnote.)

The job redesign principles included commitments to encourage devolution of decision making (consistent with the flatter management structure aim); continue pursuit of equal employment opportunity and industrial democracy objectives; improve career prospects; and reduce health and safety hazards at work.

4.4.5 Consultation

A significant feature of the APS Second Tier Agreement was making management-employee consultation more integral to APS industrial relations. Overall, union leaders saw that the Agreement required APS agency and department managements to consult and negotiate with them from the planning stage of changes.[25] Also attached to the Agreement were undertakings to jointly address a number of significant issues, including new technology. A three step procedure, incorporating union consultation, was envisaged. Management would provide unions with information about expected staff impacts and productivity gains. A joint review of Department of Social Security absenteeism (identified as a problem)[26] was agreed, aiming to identify causes and the suitability of existing policies. A dispute avoidance and settling procedure was agreed. Work would continue while a specified series of steps to address conflict issues was followed, as long as occupational health and safety guidelines were not breached. The unions also agreed to joint reviews of permanent part-time employee policy.

Having identified the APS-wide commitments to award restructuring, the ATO

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[24]   Job Redesign Principles attached to the Second Tier Wage Agreement.

[25]   As noted in the previous section, ACOA expected to "negotiate technical change agreements directly with agencies", (indicated by ACOA National Secretary in 21 December 1987 letter to all APS departments).

[26]   Significantly, absenteeism has been reported to result in more lost production than industrial disputes. Deery and Plowman (1991: 64) cite a study which claims to show that absenteeism is nearly fifteen times more important than industrial disputes as a cause of lost working time. They suggest that "strikes result in less than 0.2 per cent of possible working days being lost" (1991: 62).

implementation of award restructuring will now be discussed, then work organisation and industrial relations changes in the ATO will be analysed, followed by discussion of other public sector organisations.

4.5 Office Structures Implementation

A process called Office Structures Implementation (OSI) put the APS Second Tier Agreement into effect. Each agency (following devolution principles) determined how to implement the Agreement and award restructuring. Included in the Agreement was a commitment to move staff into the new award within six months. Developments varied across the APS, perhaps not surprising given its size and, in agencies like the ATO, the time-consuming participatory method used.

4.5.1 Office Structures Implementation in the Australian Taxation Office

The ATO is one of the three largest APS agencies.[27] As in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (Tucker 1992) and the Department of Social Security (DSS), OSI job redesign disbanded dedicated typing and data processing areas, integrating keyboard and clerical tasks, partly motivated by concern about RSI costs. ATO job redesign most affected its tax return processing, where limited task range jobs dominated ('basic' processing such as sorting paper returns, or checking for key information like tax file numbers). These functions were central to the ATO, occupying about 15 per cent (2,500) of ATO staff (Mathews 1992a: 52). OSI did not affect other ATO sections (with more diverse jobs) as much as 'Returns Processing', although all the ATO was to initiate job redesign. Returns Processing included dedicated keyboard operator areas where workers (overwhelmingly women) keyed data: "production line type work [in] very limited, dead end jobs" (Interview E). The production line image suggests the 'typical' industrial, blue collar, factory work setting.[28] ATO employees in other sections regarded processing workers as inferior because their jobs were 'mundane' and did not require the specialised training of, for instance, auditors, some of whom considered themselves "an elite" (Interview E) compared to processing staff. The separate awards covering different areas of ATO work reflected and maintained this status division.

An important issue here, now receiving more research attention, is the 'gendered' recognition and reward of work skills.[29] As noted above, ATO female workers dominated lower classifications. Award restructuring offered potential to redress this, to the extent it altered existing skill recognition. (Although detailed exploration of this issue was beyond the scope of this project some comments are

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[27]   Defence and Social Security are the other two largest Commonwealth departments.

[28]   Braverman (1974) argued that in the twentieth century, white collar office work was subject to a similar rationalisation process of work division and deskilling to that found in manufacturing.

[29]   See, for instance, the collection edited by Elaine Butler and Mike Brown (1993).

given below.)

The ATO pursued OSI with union co-operation and support, quite a change from the 'stormy' industrial relations up to 1985. If such relations had continued, with unions opposing management's change plans, doubtless the ATO would have found it more difficult to change work organisation. However, "the new approach cast unions in the role of internal stakeholders" (Teicher 1990: 186), although more consultative industrial relations did not resolve all industrial tensions (see below).

Work and job redesign in the more consultative ATO involved union participation at various levels, starting in the National Management Advisory Committee. At the level below this, each Branch Office Steering Committee included union representation and individual Branch office OSI teams (that facilitated job redesign) included management and union representation. They received training to develop and support participative working parties established in job redesign areas. With assistance from the Branch OSI team, these working parties encouraged staff involvement in developing award restructuring job redesign proposals and implementing work organisation changes.

4.5.2 Creation of Returns Processing

Job redesign was a priority for the sections making up Returns Processing. Keyboard operators in this area transferred tax information on paper returns to the ATO computer system. The creation of Returns Processing used the participatory job redesign process developed by the ATO in the mid 1980s.[30] Notably, the introduction of new technologies (such as electronic lodgment of returns, ELS) and self assessment moved much data keying from the ATO to Tax Agent offices, as the ATO developed the ability to receive information in computer readable formats.[31] Nearly half the Returns Processing staff was redeployed during job redesign.[32]

In June 1988 a 'Working Party' was set up to develop work organisation options for what became Returns Processing, with management and union representatives from each functional area: Input, Output, Receiving, Returns Examination, File Control Unit and Records. The party was trained to present information on ATO structure, work and job design; facilitate employee contributions; and judge work organisation options. It did not recommend any of the options it identified since none received strong staff support, but it argued that employees

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[30]   The information in this section comes from interviews and internal ATO documents, including reports from the Returns Processing Working Party in the ATO Adelaide Branch office.

[31]   The Australian Taxpayers Association argues that the cost advantages to the ATO from this are good reason for the ATO to pay Tax Agents for their use of ELS (Joint Committee of Public Accounts 1993: 131).

[32]   Also, this section's employee numbers fluctuate as they are transferred to other sections after the workload peak in the first half of the financial year. Notably, the Commonwealth Parliament's Joint Committee of Public Accounts (1993: 204) could not determine how much productivity increase was due to employee efficiency and performance improvement, and how much to technology and procedure changes.

supported redesigned work areas.[33]

     A Returns Processing Implementation Team was established in August 1988 with management and union representatives. It would also use the participative process. Its final report in March 1989 recommended four Returns Processing sections, estimating negligible salary costs with savings in the longer term as staff became multi-skilled. In the following processing 'busy season' (July to December), the division of work would continue the previous practice: keyboard operators would perform most keying work and 'clericals' the clerical work. After this period, increased training would develop multi-skilled workers to perform keyboard and clerical duties.

4.5.3 Teams

     The Returns Processing concept involved organising workers into teams. The initial plan was for two ASO level 4 staff across eight teams, covering 160 to 170 employees. Staff opposed this, achieving eight ASO level 4 positions, providing more promotion opportunities in a structure of eight teams, each with around twenty members. It was argued that this was an instance of employees affecting ATO changes, contrary to some staff's view that management predetermined outcomes and employee participation was a sham (Interview E).

     Each team would perform the range of processing tasks on returns and ideally each team would have a similar spread of work skills. This did not occur as well as hoped, partly because the participative process permitted staff determination of team membership. Management "did not want to create too much disaffection by breaking up social relationships workers had developed in the previous work environment" (Interview A). Many teams formed around workplace friendships. An uneven spread of clerical and keyboard skills resulted, making it impractical to expect even team output immediately (Interview K). Staff required training in areas where they had not previously worked: keyboard operators needed clerical training and clerical workers needed keyboard skills training.

     Teicher (1992a: 32-33) reports that creating Returns Processing in the Melbourne ATO was a prolonged process, (implemented in 1990-91), with productivity dropping to such an extent that National Office pressured the Melbourne Office to revert to the previous division of work, causing some employee resentment. Similarly in Adelaide, meeting the processing target towards the end of 1990 was problematic (Interview A). Changed work organisation had meant simultaneous

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[33]   92 per cent of respondents to a Working Party survey of employees supported change. Almost three quarters believed that they had sufficient opportunity to participate in the redesign process. 55 per cent believed their influence would be minimal or none, and a third thought it would be moderate. 54 per cent of staff responding to the Working Party's questionnaire supported a unified Returns Processing section, just over a third of the section's staff. A third did not respond, with lowest response rates among higher level staff.

lodging and assessing of returns. Management instructed Returns Service (as Adelaide's Returns Processing was from early 1990) to lodge and assess separately.[34] The imposition of a less efficient work organisation involving double handling annoyed workers. Employee critics of ATO job redesign complained management retained old attitudes, including decision making prerogative, and did not consult genuinely (Interview G). Generally, however, employees appreciated increased management consultation (Interview B).

Job redesign and teams changed supervisory routines. In the early 1980s keying rates were monitored, with supervisor pressure to maintain the required rate. In teams supervisors were less disciplinarian, more encouraging and took on 'human resource management' functions, like coordinating staff training (Interview I). Potentially workers could benefit from multi-functional teams, with different level employees, by having more varied jobs and more opportunities to learn other tasks. Chances to perform higher duties could increase, enhancing career prospects. More functionally flexible staff could benefit the ATO, making temporary absences easier to fill.

While the team structure may have reduced the hierarchical organisation structure that imposed work discipline, work pressure may have risen. An ex-keyboard operator (Interview B) explained, before job redesign it "didn't really matter if you didn't get into work because someone else would do the work. Now if you don't show up the burden falls on the rest of the team". Teams increased workers' self discipline as, not wanting to let their team 'down', workers wanted to be known to be contributing their fair share.

This section has outlined ATO implementation of award restructuring, especially in the area most affected, Returns Processing, in the Adelaide Branch office, emphasising the participatory process used to change work organisation. More co-operative ATO industrial relations and significant work changes occurred in a central part of the ATO, arguably benefiting both management and workers. The next section further analyses ATO job redesign, drawing on material from Adelaide employees to note some limitations of ATO award restructuring, arguing that conflicts between management and employees continued and that job redesign was not as extensive as some argue (Mathews 1992a).

4.6 Employee Responses

Many employees supported changing repetitive, single task jobs to multi-task jobs. However, employee responses varied. Having to perform lower level tasks concerned higher level employees, while having to learn new skills and change their

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34 · Interview K (a manager, thirty years in the ATO) said the name change came from employees. It aimed to indicate that staff provided a quality service and were not just doing simple processing jobs requiring little skill.

job made many data processors, or keyboard operators, unhappy.[35] Some workers had adapted to the ATO's hierarchical job design and objected to job redesign. Work reorganisation included the prospect of redundancies and fewer low level jobs. As a result "[a]t first, a lot of people resisted the changes" (Interview B). However, many former keyboard operators supported more varied jobs and promotional opportunities.

Union officials advocated job redesign and classification reform, seeing benefits in more interesting jobs, better skills recognition, and increased career opportunities. For some employees, union officials appeared closer to management than workers. The vexed issue of union incorporation into management structures also arose for union delegates who complained they did much work in joint management-union committees but this was often unappreciated by ATO employees, including union members (February 1992, PSU union delegates meeting, Adelaide). Also, lower level employees were assumed to support job redesign (Interview C).

4.6.1 Training

The ATO aimed to spend six per cent of its annual salary budget on training (Teicher 1992a: 29). Through the late 1980s ATO training programs increased substantially. In 1991-92 employees spent more than twice as much time in ATO training compared to 1986-87.[36] Work reorganisation, tax law administration changes (especially self assessment) and new taxes necessitated employee training. Creating work teams with multi-skilled workers required employee training. Before establishing Returns Processing, managers encouraged workers to familiarise themselves with other work areas and attend training sessions, but training arrangements were not entirely satisfactory. Employees delivered much training to fellow workers via a 'buddy system'. Its quality varied widely and could influence how individuals coped with work organisation changes.

4.6.2 Value of Work Skills

Some staff criticised disbanding dedicated keyboard jobs because it undervalued keyboard skills. Note that the Second Tier Wage Agreement included a 50 per cent (of the working day) maximum 'keying' guideline. Keyboard operators had to learn clerical skills, from which they might infer that keying skills were less valued than other work skills, as no longer could an employee only enter data by 'keying'. (Keyboard operators being among the lowest paid might already suggest

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[35]   This theme is also reported for the disbanding of dedicated keyboard work areas in another APS job redesign (Whyte 1992).

[36]   In 1986-87 there were 58,409 participant days (number attending course multiplied by its duration) of ATO staff development and training (*Annual Report* 1987-88: 149, Table 30). In 1991-92 there were 133,889 person days of formal training in the ATO (*Annual Report* 1991-92: 254). At June 30 1991 the ATO had 19,166 staff, (*Corporate Plan 1991-1994*: 1), while at June 30 1987 there were 17,847 (*Annual Report* 1986-87: 33).

this.)

The 'value' accorded work skills directly affects workers' pay and their sense of self worth. Work level descriptions in the APS Second Tier Agreement's Attachment E suggested limited alteration of the established work skills hierarchy in the new award structure. For instance, level 1 positions had close direction and involved various "basic office skills and routines such as providing receptionist services; ... filing; photocopying; collating". Keying work was primarily level 1 but could involve "data containing specialised or unusual technical terms or complicated tables or diagrams which demand considerable judgement about layout, and the manipulation and interpretation of data before and during entry". Workers at this level could assist more senior staff and draft "basic material for inclusion in reports and submissions". If the degree of self-direction, range of skills and knowledge, and level of responsibility warranted it, support positions (administrative and/or secretarial) could be graded at level 2. Some latitude was permitted in determining the levels of particular tasks. However, these definitions do not suggest a re-evaluation of keying and other 'secretarial' and 'clerical' skills.

Another view was that the new work design, requiring higher level employees to key 'their own' work, was expensive for the ATO as these employees were untrained, inexperienced and inefficient 'keyers', so the ATO paid more for keying work (that remained in the ATO) (Interview I). New information technologies and job redesign that moved data keying to Tax Agent offices reduced this potential. New information and communication technologies permitted electronic and other automated tax return lodgement, making 'manual' tax return processing increasingly redundant in the ATO.

Job redesign reduced the proportion of lower graded jobs, although technological change also contributed significantly. A higher average staff classification level had positive and negative implications for management.[37] From higher level staff, management would expect higher productivity and a higher wages bill (which became a problem for the ATO in the early 1990s). Workers could expect more rewarding jobs and better career opportunities, although jobs may be more demanding. Union officials supported teams, believing opportunities for lower level staff to undertake higher level work would rise (Interview F). Management would benefit from a more functionally flexible and knowledgeable staff who could perform various work tasks.

The ATO's 1988 OSI guide (ATO May 1988) described five classification principles for incorporating previous grades in the new office classification structure, some implying a downgrading objective. These came from a 1987 DIR circular on OSI, emphasising that agencies and departments endeavour to minimise potential

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[37]   More on changing staff classification level in the section on 'staff profile' below.

salary cost increases from re-classification. Management was to "make full use of the depth of work now inherent in the new broad ranges which permit a very high order of multi-skilling to be accommodated at each level of the new structure" (ATO May 1988: 6), and be aware that "jobs should be redesigned so as to avoid attracting higher classifications for performing a mixture of work which includes only limited proportions from a higher level". Significant tensions over classifying job tasks developed. Adelaide ATO unionists believed ATO budget difficulties encouraged less conciliatory management, especially over issues with cost implications (Interview F and union delegate meetings in 1992). Management pressed to classify tasks at lower levels. This occurred in the context of

> a lot of people doing higher duties over a long period of time. There is a skill shift, so all the 2's know what the ASO 3's are doing. Management says, ah well, the 2's can do that, why don't we bring the work down to the 2 level. It is an ongoing battle (Interview F).

The regulation and classification of work were not settled. Implementing the new award structure involved negotiation over the classification of tasks.

4.6.3 Multi-skilling or Multi-tasking

Work reorganisation aimed to replace jobs dominated by one task with multi-task work. Returns Processing jobs gained more task variety: "instead of the functions being separated, they are now joined together" (Interview B). However, many lower level (ASO 1) jobs remained. Many consisted of tasks requiring low level skills (Interview K). Even so, employees critical of the ATO's OSI job redesign agreed jobs had improved and that industrial relations were more consultative. Many "would never go back to the old way" (Interview B). Improved work was due not only to job redesign, but also to the introduction of new technology, for instance, in the Electronic Lodgement Service (ELS). Disbanding dedicated keying areas and creating an integrated Returns Processing section meant "an improvement by broadening the horizons of workers. Previously many women were locked into keying areas. It is still somewhat restricted because of these women having to do particular limited tasks" (Interview C), suggesting limits to award restructuring's job redesign and the creation of more stimulating jobs.

> More complex work has not been created. Return Service staff are being loaned out to other sections. Such staff generally do reconciliation (balancing the books basically) tasks that they have traditionally done. Its not a great improvement (Interview C).

Critics of ATO job redesign argued that the 'whole job concept' was not achieved because tasks from different levels were not integrated.

> Tasks have just been lumped together. There was no looking up and down the classification

levels when redesigning jobs. The process was restricted to looking within the
classification band. The redesigned jobs consisted of a bunching together of previously
separated tasks (Interview D).

Management did not want jobs classified upwards (possible if new jobs included
higher level tasks). Workers in the lowest classification (ASO 1) did more tasks, but
the work remained segmented, with workers organised by rosters, doing one task for
a period, then another. Not much was done to create jobs with a range of tasks. Some
managers and other employees believed the ATO would inevitably retain some low
level work, as some simple processing tasks would remain. For some, this was
positive because some individuals had difficulty with more demanding tasks
(Interview K).

Claims to have established multi-skilled jobs through award restructuring's job
redesign were also disputed in the Melbourne ATO, where workers remained more
numerous at lower levels, particularly in Returns Processing, and because the majority
of ATO employees remained low skilled "in terms of externally recognised
qualifications or participation in internal training" (Teicher 1992a: 28-29; 28).[38] Job
redesign in the Adelaide ATO had different implications for different sections, being
more significant in processing areas (particularly Returns Service) than in technical
areas, such as Audit, where previous task division largely continued (Interview C).
Generally in the processing area employees are more mobile, going to different office
areas as work loads fluctuate. Whether this increased employee skills is debatable.

4.6.4 Simplifying Work

Award restructuring, job redesign, self assessment and new information
technologies automated and simplified some tasks, but also made some processing
jobs more complex by incorporating tasks previously performed in other jobs. Process
and technology changes reduced several 'mundane' tasks in the ATO, such as mail
opening and data keying (Interview G). However, self assessment simplified tax
returns and, thereby, tax return processing (Interview G). "The simplification of
returns is driving the complexity of the work back down. There was some slight up-
skilling with the putting together of some tasks" (Interview D), suggesting that
changes to perceived skill levels were not all in one direction.

Low level jobs were reduced in the ATO. Some tasks were automated and
some data keying work was effectively shifted outside the ATO. Formerly the ATO
had a large number of dedicated keyboard operators who transferred information from
paper tax returns to the ATO's computer system. Many other ATO employees carried
out simple functions, like opening and sorting mail. Tax Agents, encouraged to use

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[38]   At end of June 1991, 37 per cent of ATO employees were in the revenue collection group (where
simpler tax return processing occurred). It easily remained the biggest group, with audit next largest at 20
per cent (ATO 1991: 1).

ELS, increasingly send tax returns to the ATO by either the telecommunications system or on computer discs. The ATO makes it attractive to lodge tax returns electronically by processing them quickly.[39] Data is keyed into computer readable format in Tax Agent offices, displacing keying work from the ATO: "the keying is not being done in the Tax Office, but someone is doing it, and it is not subject to the same controls as it is in the Tax Office" (Interview I). In all probability, Tax Agent employees had inferior working conditions compared to those in the ATO, perhaps suggesting a new level of segmentation in the 'Taxation' workforce.

4.6.5 Career Opportunities

Restructuring awards covering public sector office work promised improved career opportunities for workers previously stuck in keyboard and clerical-assistant jobs. These mostly women workers could not advance into the clerical stream and its higher level jobs. Employees without accountancy or law qualifications could not be promoted in technical areas. During OSI, in early 1989, the Section 33A prescription (the 'bar') was removed (Boucher 1989: 179). Integration of the three streams clearly improved lower level workers' prospects for classification advance. In the Adelaide office, career options for lower level staff improved, but promotion opportunities became limited as fewer resignations cut vacant positions.[40]

An ATO salary budget 'shortfall' reduced promotional opportunities. In the Adelaide ATO, freezing promotions for eighteen months up to mid 1992 aggravated limits on promotion. A large fall in resignations in the early 1990s recession worsened the salary budget problem as longer employment tended to raise employee classification levels. The PSU (in early 1992) claimed the ATO was subject to various government initiatives reducing its budget and that the ATO overstated its efficiency improvements to meet its Department of Finance funding arrangement requirements.[41]

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[39]   From ELS' start, the ATO has sought to achieve the turn-round of ELS lodged returns within fourteen days. The *ATO Corporate Plan 1991 - 1994* (p20) and the following three year Corporate Plan (p15) specify that 80% of electronic returns will be processed within 14 days, and 98% of paper returns will be processed within 8 weeks.

[40]   Boucher (1989: 177) states "For the period 1981 to 1986 the average rate of resignation from the ATO was 8.74%. The Service-wide average is something like 6%". According to Boucher, lowest grade employees were six times more likely to resign than higher (ASO 6) level employees. In 1985 the ATO resignation rate was 13.4 per cent. According to ATO figures (Annual Report 1991/92: 240) resignations in 1987/88 and 1988/89 were over 1,400 in each year, falling to less than 500 in 1990/91 and 355 in 1991/92 (figures refer to permanent officers; does not include inter-departmental movements). Notably the PSC reports (1992: 57) that the APS "separation rate" in 1990-91 was 2.8 per cent, the lowest since 1966, when collation of records in the way then used, began. A survey of ATO staff in late 1989 found that over half were "very pessimistic" about a fair and rewarding ATO career (Jans and Frazer-Jans 1990). (Based on a questionnaire survey of 3,628 ATO staff, with an 87 per cent response rate, slightly biased towards higher level staff.) Reduced promotional opportunities aggravated dissatisfaction among ATO staff.

[41]   'Modernisation' salary savings, an APS wide 1.25 per cent annual 'efficiency dividend', and an alleged failure by the Department of Finance to fund wage increases (PSU 1992: 40-42). The 'efficiency dividend' was regarded by the union as an arbitrary cost-cutting impost on the public service and a "case of double dipping by the Department of Finance" (PSU 1992: 41). 'Modernisation' refers to the ATO's program for computer technology upgrading, beginning with a funding agreement between the ATO and the Department of Finance in 1989, followed by a 'Modernisation Agreement' between the ATO and the PSU. At this point union amalgamation in the ATO developed, achieving single union coverage in 1990.

In short, staff was doing more work than officially recognised.

Overall, in 1992-93 the ATO had more staff than its salary budget funded (see Joint Committee of Public Accounts 1993: 152), adding pressure on ATO management. One response would be to classify job tasks downwards. Another management strategy was to not replace employees leaving the ATO, increasing workload and stress levels for remaining workers.[42] The PSU argued ATO efficiency would fall and warned the ATO (and the Government) this approach promised future tax collection problems. Experienced staff leaving for more lucrative outside opportunities depleted ATO staff skills. These points indicate sources of tension in ATO industrial relations and continuing differences between management and employees.

4.6.6 Stress

An aspect of work difficult to measure, but receiving increasing attention, is work related stress, reported to be increasing in many countries.[43] The International Labour Office (ILO) reports that in Australia in 1990 stress claims were "35 per cent of all workers' compensation costs for government employees", but in the private sector the equivalent was just 2.5 per cent (1993: 67).[44] ATO employees commented that at least some employees experienced greater stress and pressure from redesigned jobs. The ATO developed a stress management policy in the early 1990s (Interviews H, J), aiming to identify workplace sources of stress and minimise exposure to reduce compensation claims, recognising that stress could be related to many issues including job design, training, access to promotions, physical working environment, social interaction at work (and home), and the individual's understanding of their workplace.

ATO financial difficulties added to work pressures felt by employees. An instance of falling employee numbers was in an area where employee numbers were claimed to have fallen from 36 to 12 as a result of not replacing workers leaving the area (Interview E). The union believed this section had suffered "severe cuts".[45] In this work environment some workers took time off because of work pressure but did not record it as stress leave. For example, one person (Interview J, over twenty years in the ATO) took six weeks long service leave. Apart from the difficulty of proving a work stress claim, there was, and is, much stigma and stress associated with making such a stress claim. Workers did not want stress leave on their personnel history file

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42   By 1991-92 the ATO reduced new appointments (down to 244) even more dramatically than the fall in resignations (*Annual Report 1991/92*).

43   In Japan there are claims of death from overwork, *karoshi* (ILO 1993: 67); in the United States stress-related claims for workers compensation increased from 5 per cent of occupational disease claims in 1980 to 15 per cent in 1989 (ILO 1993: 67).

44   Of Commonwealth employees' compensation claims in 1990-91, 16 percent were for stress, which cost the Government $17.46 million (PSU *Occupational Health and Safety Hazard Sheet* No. 1, July 1992).

45   PSU Submission to the Public Accounts Committee Inquiry Into The ATO: 16.

(Interview J). A view in the ATO was that stress had increased in the workplace as many workers found it difficult to cope with the range of changes.[46]

This section has discussed the significant work redesign associated with ATO award restructuring. However, operational and technological changes also influenced work and job design in the ATO in this period. Many jobs with very limited task range were redesigned to include a broader range, but not all ATO areas were affected equally. The area processing most tax returns, Returns Service, was most affected, with low level jobs reduced significantly. Low level workers gained more access to higher level work, although some low level tasks remained. Opinions differed about the significance of this job redesign. Some argued that similar level tasks were aggregated together and still performed repetitively, while others emphasised the disbanding of data processing jobs, reduction of low level tasks and the integration of keying and clerical work. The ATO encountered financial constraints in its salaries budget, imposing limits on promotional opportunities, and management pressed to classify tasks 'downwards' by incorporating broad ranges of tasks at particular levels. Further, increasing stress levels among employees suggest possible employee health problems from the changes in the ATO. Whether workers experienced an increase in their work skills is debatable.

4.7 Other Australian Public Service Organisations in the 1980s

This section looks at work and industrial relations changes in other APS agencies as a comparison with the ATO. In the early 1990s some studies of award restructuring in public sector organisations were published (Curtain *et al.* 1992). Did the ATO pursue a radically different approach to other public sector organisations? Individual APS agencies implemented OSI differently, reflecting variations between agencies in operations and industrial relations, including management preferences and employee responses. One option was to set up regional offices specialising in a limited range of an organisation's activities while centralising other functions. The PSU expressed concern about such proposals for the ATO which involved "having a function located in one Branch office but servicing a region", as this reduced regional staff's access to career opportunities (PSU 1992: 19). Alternatively, regional offices could offer the full range of the organisation's services, giving staff access to a wider range of functions.[47]

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Second Tier job redesign process resembled the ATO experience, with strong union involvement, disbanding dedicated

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[46]   This was the view of several, including those with occupational health and safety experience (e.g. Interview H) and managers (e.g. a manager, in an address on the ATO experience, identified 'change management' and 'change agents' as very important).

[47]   In the late 1980s the CES moved to differentiated service delivery, permitting narrow specialisation, creation of separate units in the CES (organisationally and physically), constraining award restructuring's multi-skilling objective (Maconachie 1993).

data entry work areas, integrating clerical and data processing functions and developing participative work redesign.[48] Union delegates had time off to develop ideas for the job redesign process and their participation increased the redesign process credibility. Staff benefited, it is reported, from reduced RSI incidence, the creation of more varied jobs and "improved career prospects" (Tucker 1992: 18). While there was some cynicism about employee participation in job redesign, many employees were positive.

Tucker also notes an increase in "stress-related health problems" and "some grumbles about the relative status of clerical and keyboard tasks, from both sides" (Tucker 1992: 18). Staff dissatisfaction arose from delays in job redesign, occurring well after the Second Tier Agreement pay rise (Tucker 1992: 17). The approach of local managers affected job redesign outcomes. The ABS saw this office as having stronger management commitment than others, and was estimated to have had more successful job redesign (Tucker 1992: 16). Overall, the ABS incurred some extra costs from job redesign (in expenditure and staff time), but also achieved efficiency gains, while broadbanding allowed job reductions (Tucker 1992: 18). Award restructuring was positive for developing more effective work organisation and the introduction of new technology. Significantly more co-operative industrial relations developed.

Similar to the ATO, Australia Post's industrial relations history included significant disputation. Management wanted to introduce new technology from at least 1975, but it did not consult with the union. In 1983 Australia Post introduced letter indexing machines as a less radical option to optical character readers, but without union co-operation the machines remained unused until the 1987 Second Tier Agreement. It aimed to increase mail processing productivity ten per cent (Carr 1992: 99). Unlike in the ATO, there were substantial staff cuts (Carr 1992: 97), although the Australia Post award restructuring agreement committed to no retrenchments. Workers believed keying standards for the letter indexing machines and manual sorting rates were too high, and supervisory staff overbearing (Carr 1992: 100). Industrial relations conflict developed, with a serious dispute in 1989 (at Clayton South mail centre). Its resolution included introducing 'participative management' - union and employee consultation and participation in decision making processes. In Australia Post's award restructuring agreement, the union accepted electronic mail sorting equipment "expected to reduce mail sorting staff by 1,100 by 1994" (Carr 1992: 110).

Carr (1992: 106) argues that Australia Post industrial relations deteriorated through 1988 because of management's non-consultative approach rather than its aims for new technology and work change, which the union accepted. A consultative process would have produced far less employee and union resistance. Carr argues that

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48   Although it was called the Office Structures Integration Program (Tucker 1992).

the Australia Post experience suggests employee participation is of limited value by itself (to the organisation) unless it is part of a larger strategy incorporating other specific goals, such as introducing new technology and/or changing work organisation (Carr 1992: 112-113). Teicher (1989: 147) reports that Australia Post's adoption of a participative process was influenced by wanting to reduce costs.

These two examples show significant parallels to ATO developments during award restructuring, particularly in developing more consultative industrial relations and in integrating keyboard and clerical work. An instance of a contrasting public sector approach is the Australian Securities Commission (ASC).[49] Its chairperson pursued a 'cost minimisation' strategy, believing centralised document processing would rationalise the previous State and Federal organisations and achieve cost efficiencies (Probert and Hack 1991: 7). Avoiding high Central Business District office costs and labour market problems (of high turnover and low productivity) by setting up an information processing centre in a regional area was a major aim. One was set up in the La Trobe Valley with 340 employees, a "flat organisational structure and the overwhelming preponderance of jobs at the ASO1 and ASO2 grades" (Probert and Hack 1991: 13).[50] This organisational structure and work division geographically separated the 'back-office' from the 'front office', establishing separate work spheres. Back-office tasks involved relatively simple processing and no direct contact with either clients/customers or management, while front office tasks were more varied, and included public contact.[51] Most ASC workers were restricted to relatively simple, repetitive jobs. However, they expressed satisfaction with most aspects of their work, seen as a product of limited local job options, especially for women, and the workplace's brief existence (Probert and Hack 1991). (The study occurred seven months after the centre opened.)

This ASC experience is part of a trend, in both private and public sectors, relocating "labour intensive office services" from expensive industrialised inner city areas to regions with lower labour and building costs (Probert and Hack 1991: 15). Advances in information and communication technologies enhance separation of 'back-office' and 'front' office functions. In contrast to the ASC, the ATO strategy from the mid 1980s worked towards the "elimination of lower grade (ASO1 to ASO3) routine jobs altogether. In the ATO the introduction of office automation is being used to create new higher skill jobs" (Probert and Hack 1991: 14).

This brief description of award restructuring in Federal public sector

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[49] Mathews (1992b: 114) cites the ASC in this context. It became the national body for administering Australia's companies and securities laws in 1991.

[50] 118 employees were temporary (Probert and Hack 1991: 13), a short-term measure required by the large quantity of work from the ASC's predecessors. 87 per cent of jobs at the La Trobe Centre were at the "lowest grades of the Administrative Services Officer award" (Probert and Hack 1991: 11).

[51] This is quite ironic as one source of the researchers, (a Director of the ASC's Information Division), the ASC head was interested in this style of development because it could do away with the staff differentiation problems associated with 'back-office' processing (Probert and Hack 1991:7).

organisations suggests some differences and similarities in management policies and workplace changes. Union consultation was important to these public sector agencies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, except for the ASC,[52] and the introduction of new technologies automated some tasks and was linked with job redesign. More consultative industrial relations minimised workplace tensions by engaging employee representatives in workplace oriented activities, such as consultative processes, thereby building workplace commitment and reducing antagonistic management-employee relations. The next section focusses on changes in the ATO's staff profile as part of considering how much the ATO has changed its hierarchical structure, industrial relations and employee management strategy, while the conclusion considers factors influencing recent workplace change and organisation choices.

4.7.1 Profile Change

Different management approaches to work organisation and information technologies (which are inter-related) influence an organisation's employee profile. The ATO and the ASC organised their operations differently, with different implications for their workforce classification profile. From the mid 1980s the ATO changed its organisation profile significantly, in one view, from a classic pyramid shape (with workers concentrated in lower grades) to an onion shape (with most employees in middle classifications) (Mathews 1992a).[53] In the early 1980s around 60 per cent of ATO employees were in the equivalent of the lowest two grades, ASO 1 and ASO 2 (PSU 1992: 45). The Tax Commissioner in early 1989 stated that 50 per cent of ATO jobs were then at these levels (Boucher 1989: 183).[54] The PSU's submission to a 1992 inquiry put "about 35-38% of staff at these bottom two points", but argued this was still too high "in the context of a career structure", albeit marking substantial improvement in the ATO (PSU 1992: 45). These figures suggest significant change to the ATO staff profile. Teicher (1992: 28-29), however, argues that the ATO is still some distance away from the 'modern Tax Office' staffed by more highly skilled workers. He is more cautious than Mathews in evaluating ATO change.

Comparing ATO developments with the APS as a whole adds insight into the significance of ATO changes. From the early 1980s, the proportion of low classification level APS office workers fell. In the APS in 1981-82, 59.2 per cent of ASO workers were in the bottom two ASO equivalent classifications; in 1985-86 this group was 55.2 per cent and at the end of the 1980s it was 47.5 per cent (ABS 1992,

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[52]   This issue is not reported in detail for the ASC.

[53]   Such a trend would be especially notable given that one group to lose out in contemporary economic restructuring is middle management - this strata being reduced substantially.

[54]   Teicher (1992: 28) cites the same figures for 1990. ATO *Annual Reports* suggest little change over the first half of the 1980s. The categories of clerks, data processing staff, typists and assistants made up around two thirds of ATO staff in 1982 and 1985. In 1988 the lowest two ASO levels made up 50 per cent of ATO employees. By June 1992 this had fallen to just over one third: 35.3 per cent. (Various ATO *Annual Reports*.)

Cat. No. 5239.0, Table 10: 18), suggesting that the ATO reflects wider developments in the APS.[55] The reduction was primarily in the bottom level (down over 7 points to 31.1 per cent).[56] Women's concentration in the lowest level fell, but change to the distribution of staff by gender is quite gradual. Women still dominate the lower levels.[57]

Many associate ATO industrial relations change with the Commissioner appointed in 1984, Trevor Boucher (Teicher 1990: 186). Mathews (1992a, 1994) argues that Boucher was critical to ATO change and this fits with "organisational theory" that "a new champion of change was needed at the top to act as the vehicle for the profound adjustments needed" (1994: 235; 1992a: 3). Mathews also appreciates, however, that Boucher could not change the ATO single-handedly; he "assembled a talented and dedicated team of senior executives" (1992a: 185, Note 6).

4.8 Conclusion

From the mid 1980s the ATO became more consultative as employee involvement in decision making processes increased. Work reorganisation affected many lower level workers. Three separate award streams that had prevented most keyboard operators, primarily women, from advancing beyond the lowest classifications, were replaced by a single award structure covering APS office-based work. Promotion opportunities for low level workers increased and they received larger percentage pay rises (although achieving equitable pay rates would take many such increases). More varied jobs developed as keyboard and clerical tasks were integrated, indicating significant work redesign during award restructuring.

For 'optimistic post-Fordists' the most productive use of new technologies 'requires' democratic workplaces (Mathews 1989a).[58] However, technological change in a public sector subject to fiscal restraint has seen workers reduced and the 'contracting out' of work. The moving of data keying to Tax Agent offices arguably involved shifting some tax administration work to a 'secondary' workforce outside the ATO, while within the ATO career opportunities improved, employee shaping of work organisation increased (breaking with the classic Taylorist separation of work conception and execution), and union participation expanded. However, whether increased consultation significantly challenged managerial prerogative is arguable. While lower level tasks and jobs were reduced, the remaining lower level processing tasks continued to be performed repetitively in a segmented work organisation. Some

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[55]   Figures are for 31 December of each fiscal year. In December 1981 there were 87,073 ASO employees in the APS; in 1985-85, 105,054 and in 1989-90, 99,272.

[56]   Over the last four fiscal years of the 1980s there was an increase in all higher classifications, the largest being in level seven (up two per cent to 6.5 of the total), and level three (up 2.5 to 13 per cent).

[57]   Graphs in the ATO *1993-94 Annual Report*: 35, depicting the gender distribution of employees showing only gradual change over period 1988-89 to 1993-94.

[58]   See Chapter Two above, also argued by Harley 1994.

argue that multi-tasking rather than multi-skilling characterised job redesign, as it aggregated similar level tasks. ATO employees disputed that 'whole' jobs were created as described by the ATO in its Second Tier Agreement. Also, more varied and demanding jobs increased work pressure and stress levels.

Management was wary of job classification change that 'upgraded' skills. As a proportion, lower level jobs were reduced but a fall in resignations and budget constraints (restricting job classification upgrades) limited promotional opportunities and increased the average classification level. Raised expectations were not met, sapping employee morale. However, through award restructuring, ATO women employees gained more access to workplace consultation, training and career paths than women in private sector clerical jobs (Probert 1991), in contrast to many women workers with little or no access to workplace consultation, training or career paths (Butler and Connole 1993: 11).

The comparatively smaller ASC used a different strategy, employing many low level workers, while large Federal public sector departments pursued multi-skilling and more consultative industrial relations. The different courses of the ATO and the ASC imply choices in technological and organisational change (Mathews 1992b: 114). Many factors influenced the ATO, including its new Commissioner (Boucher), employee support for job redesign, union preparedness to discuss productivity and efficiency, and union resistance to a 'dual' organisation approach, with a core of skilled professionals "serviced by a network of processing 'bunkers'" (Mathews 1992a: 3; 1994: 246). Employees supported ATO work redesign but some were resistant, worried about uncertain work futures. Some believed that the unions' conciliatory approach indicated union collaboration with management.

Consideration of changes in the ATO needs careful appraisal of its context. Pressure to change ATO operations developed from the early 1980s, significantly from the new ALP government that encouraged 'participatory management' and 'industrial democracy' in the APS. Also influencing the nature of workplace change in the public sector were the relatively high public sector union density and strong workplace union presence, especially in the ATO (suggested by the major RSI dispute in the mid 1980s).[59] The ASC example, however, suggests some choice for public sector management. The ASC was much smaller than other Federal public sector agencies or departments. Active workplace unionism in the ATO was probably greater than in the newly created ASC, although the same union covered both. (Consideration of the union approach in the ASC seems to be a gap in reports on the ASC.) More detailed investigation of union activity and policy would give insight into the apparently different union approaches at the ATO and ASC. One possibility is that

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[59]   Plowman (1992: 280, Table 18.6) reproduces ABS trade union member statistics for selected years from 1982 to 1990 showing a 35 per cent difference between the public and private sectors. In 1990 union density in the public sector was 67 per cent compared to 31 in the private sector.

larger departments attract more union and government attention than do small ones. Also, the revenue raising function of the ATO and the political sensitivity of 'taxes' probably make the ATO a priority department for Government. The ATO management, with a new ALP Federal Government, changed the organisation's approach to its employees as part of wider operational and technological changes.

An important point about the ATO and other areas of the Federal public service during award restructuring is that it was possible to pursue work regulation and organisation change within the industrial award system. However, it was not the industrial relations system which stimulated those changes. More important were the operational and technological changes affecting the ATO and the APS, and the approaches of the unions and management. For the ATO it was possible to achieve award changes that fitted its work organisation aims.

It seems reasonable to argue that the relatively strong position of ATO unions enabled them to achieve modest gains for ATO workers through award restructuring. However, Teicher argues that "the union's enhanced status and increased involvement in managing the ATO is not wholly grounded in the strategic position of the unions" (1990: 186) but also results from management's approach. The Tax Commissioner observed: "Much of what the ATO has done since 1984 ... would not have been possible without the support and co-operation of the unions" (Boucher 1989: 174), suggesting management appreciation of, and support for, an important role for unions. One view is that Boucher was critical to the changes in the ATO. While not diminishing the importance of senior management's influence over an organisation's industrial relations and personnel practices, other critical influences on the ATO need to be recognised, particularly the policies of the Government and the approach of the unions. For the union its strategy of greater involvement in 'management' issues was not without its problems as some members and employees believed that the union had aligned more with management than employees. Although agreement was reached on award restructuring and job redesign, the union maintained independence from management and they continued to have divergent views on important workplace issues.

Questions remain about whether award restructuring altered the hierarchical evaluation of skills in APS office-based work. The new award structure's level descriptions did not radically change the existing valuation of work skills. A limitation of this research is that it did not systematically address the distinct measuring of women's and men's work skills. More work is necessary to determine the extent to which APS award restructuring and job redesign altered the 'gendered' evaluation of work skills. In the ATO, greater task variety and increased training (as occurred for many in the ATO) imply increased work skills, although such an evaluation may under-value specialist skills and the extent of increased work intensity.

Chapter Five: Timber Industry Workplace Change

5.1 Introduction

In the second half of the 1980s the timber industry[1] was seen by the Federal Government's Department of Industrial Relations (DIR 1988: iv) as an industry in which employers appreciated the links between award restructuring, changing work practices and employee training and understood that a co-ordinated approach to these matters would be beneficial to the industry. This chapter considers the pursuit and application of award restructuring in the timber industry. It discusses the aims of the union and employers and looks at workplace changes implemented during award restructuring. The aim is to evaluate whether award restructuring contributed to making work more skilled and rewarding, industrial relations more co-operative, and workplaces more democratic. What has been the significance of award restructuring in this industry? This is addressed at both the industry level and in some workplaces in forest products industry sectors. Identification of the effects of award restructuring on work organisation and workplace industrial relations is central. Also, do these workplaces show signs of optimistic post-Fordist workplace change?

In Chapter Three I argued that the unions' award restructuring strategy, initiated in the metal industry, aimed to contribute to a post-Fordist transformation of Australia's economy, creating a high skill workforce. It has been criticised for being suitable for industries with unionised male workforces and awards recognising a detailed division of labour, but unsuitable for other, especially 'feminised', industries (McCreadie 1989). Developments in the timber industry, a sector with some characteristics similar to the metal industry (manufacturing with mostly male workers),[2] are interesting, given these points.

Some claim can be made that forestry and forest products are a significant sector of Australia's economy, particularly in some regional areas, although not throughout the whole economy (Resource Assessment Commission [RAC] 1992a).[3] Different industries vary in characteristics, although many commentators assert that common problems, like Australia's award and union structures, beset all enterprises, (Hilmer *et al.* 1993). This research offers empirical detail to evaluate such views.

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1   The terms "timber industry" and "forest and forest products industry" are both used here.

2   For instance, at August 1991 the workforce in wood, wood products and furniture was 81.9 per cent male (ABS 1994, table 3).

3   Set up in 1989 by the Hawke ALP Government in response to a perceived increase in public concern about environmental degradation. Late that year an inquiry into Australia's forest and timber resources was established.

In the timber industry the union agitated for workplace consultation by management, a 'pay-for-skills' award structure and national training system, although it was also willing to accept some management desired changes. Employers tended to resist union involvement in workplace consultation, with larger companies introducing new practices characterised by minimal union contact, encouraging employees to identify with the employer, while some worked with the union to modify work classification.

The chapter begins by describing the research method, followed by an account of the industry. Then the two main industry parties' approaches to award restructuring are outlined, followed by a description of award restructuring in the timber industry award, discussion of enterprise implementation of award restructuring to reach an evaluation of the significance of award restructuring in these cases, and an estimation of the employee management policies pursued by employers in this industry area. The concluding discussion considers the kind of employee management strategies used by employers and how these compare with the union's award restructuring vision.

5.2 Research Method

This chapter's research consists of two 'levels', firstly, consideration of restructuring the timber industry award and the perspectives, aims and desires of the industry union and employers. This material reveals the influence of optimistic post-Fordism on the different groups' aims. Secondly, the research looks at changes in wood products workplaces resulting from, and during, award restructuring, helping to evaluate its impact on work and industrial relations. The workplaces are manufacturers of furniture, roof trusses and other building products in the Adelaide metropolitan area.

Views on the industry were gained from interviews and discussions with national and South Australian officials of the former Australian Timber Workers Union (ATWU),[4] a national employer organisation's chairman (sic), NS telephone interviews with, and an address to an ATWU award restructuring training session by, a South Australian employer representative. Due to Australia's industrial history, these organisations covered the four south-eastern states of Australia.[5] While not representative of all Australia, they did address industry level issues. Interviews with these major industry groups, from July 1992 to April 1993, provided various views on award restructuring and workplace change. A research instrument addressing work organisation changes, management structure and practice, workplace industrial relations and decision making processes, and the evolution and experience of award restructuring in the industry, was used in semi-structured interviews. The union's and employers' award restructuring and workplace change aims, and particular workplace

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[4]   Now the Forest and Forest Products division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining, Energy Union, (CFMEU). See below for brief outline of union amalgamations.
[5]   The Federal *Timber Industry Award* also covered south-eastern Australia.

developments, were discussed.

The workplace research was located in some building products, wood machining and furniture operations around Adelaide. The aim was to gauge award restructuring's effects on workplaces, investigating work organisation, whether work was becoming more skilled and industrial relations more co-operative. In early 1992 managers of several firms contacted for research responded with reluctance or resistance. One manager said his company did not want "external interference", especially during "significant upheaval" (March 1992), seemingly referring to the early 1990s recession which heightened market competition reputedly creating a "price war" (Manager, May 1992). Another manager opposed research while industrial negotiations continued because that information might become public, despite assurances of confidentiality (July 1992). Another commented he had many ideas on workplace consultation but it was "too early" to share them (March 1992). Yet another concern was that a researcher would subvert employee work commitment, particularly sensitive at the time because of ongoing changes in the company (Manager, April 1992).

The employer views on award restructuring and workplace change indicated by these conversations with managers were useful for developing the research interview instrument. Managers and various level employees of some firms were interviewed. The enterprises ranged from small companies to divisions of large Australian and overseas corporations. I conducted semi-structured interviews with a manager, supervisor and five workers, and unstructured phone interviews with several managers and workers.[6] I attended a two day union training session on award restructuring and enterprise bargaining for its workplace representatives, where individuals reported on workplace award restructuring developments (about twelve workers attended, March 1992). These interviews and discussions with various employers and workers provided a range of views, partially compensating for the limited quantity. The small number suggests the information should be treated cautiously and not taken as necessarily representative of broader trends without further research of this industry.

The information gathered from interviews is supplemented with public company reports, union and employer association documents, and the minutes of eight companies' enterprise consultative committees (ECCs). These documents show workplace developments and various parties' views of award restructuring and workplace change.

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6   Interviews were conducted at workplaces, by telephone and, in one instance, at a worker's home.

5.3 Australian Timber Industry

This section overviews the timber industry, highlighting enterprise variety, industry structural change and recent employment trends. Australia's timber and timber products industries are included in various ABS industry divisions.[7] The Federal *Timber Industry Award 1990* (the *Award*) covers "employees in the timber and wood-working industries" (Clause 5),[8] but not the paper and pulp industry or much of the furniture industry (each has a separate award), although it can cover furniture manufacture. The industry level research herein is of *Award* areas covered, while the workplace research is of firms using wood in manufacturing, such as in building products and furniture.

Much of the timber industry is in manufacturing where employment has been falling since the late 1960s, although it increased temporarily in the late 1980s before falling again in the early 1990s.[9] The following tables show employment trends in forest products industries.[10] Table 5.1 covers major sectors of the forestry and forest products industry, while table 5.2 shows employment in selected wood products industry sectors within the broader industry through the 1980s, indicating substantial employment fluctuations in wood, wood products and furniture sectors. In the two years to June 1991, jobs in wood, wood products and furniture fell nearly one sixth (15.1 per cent). A significant question is to what extent could strategies aimed at changing workforce characteristics (as per award restructuring) affect industry employment variations?

Table 5.1 Employment in forestry and forest products: 1987-8 to 1991-2

	Employment ('000)				
	1987-8	1988-9	1989-90	1990-1	1991-2
Forestry/log	10	13	11	11	12
Wood prods/furn	97	110	113	94	103
Paper/printing	130	133	127	134	119
	Gross Product by Industry ($m)				
Wood prods	2,325	2,413	2,612	2,303	2,423
Paper prods	4,331	4,612	4,903	4,714	4,366

Table Note: employment figures include printing (publishing not mentioned) and use ABS *The Labour Force, Australia*, Cat. No. 6203.0, which includes operations with less than four persons, unlike the manufacturing establishments series up to 1990-91 which is the source for the next table, explaining

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[7]   Wood processing, including sawmilling, joinery, paper and pulp production and furniture making are in the manufacturing industry classification. Forestry and logging are in the agriculture subdivision and timber merchandising is in the wholesale and retail trade industry.

[8]   The *Timber Industry Consolidated Award* 1990, AIRC, Print J2380. Clause 1 says it will be known as the *Timber Industry Award 1990*. It applies in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT. Unlike State awards (under industrial relations arrangements for most of this century), Federal awards do not cover all operations in an industry but only named employer respondents

[9]   Relates to 1984-85 to 1988-89 (ABS 1991, Cat. No. 8203.0). Late 1960s to 1982-83, Australian manufacturing employment fell 19 per cent, while in wood, wood products and furniture, employment dropped 18 per cent (establishment numbers fell 35 per cent) (Mangan 1986). In the second half of the 1980s manufacturing jobs increased nearly 50,000; wood, wood products and furniture jobs grew 15 per cent.

[10]   Primarily from Australian Bureau of Statistics published data, which needs to be treated carefully as various data series can use different definitions and categories making direct comparison problematic.

the apparent inconsistency in figures (ABS Cat. No. 8203.0). The *Agriculture and Resources Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 1, March 1993: 121-122 is also used. (Gross Product figures in the last financial year are preliminary.)

Table 5.2 Employees ('000) - selected forestry and forest product industries 1982-3 to 1988-9

	(annual average)			(at 30 June)		
	'82-3	'83-4	'84-5	'86-7	'87-8	'88-9
Sawmilling	11.1	10.7	11.1	10.5	11.3	12.1
Resawn/dressed timber	7.5	7.4	7.2	6.7	5.8	5.4
Veneers/manufactured boards of wood						
	4.7	4.6	5.3	5.2	5.3	5.4
Wooden structural fittings and joinery						
	14.7	14.1	15.1	17.3	18.1	19.2
Total wood/wood products	44.3	42.7	45.1	45.9	47.4	49.0
Total wood/furniture	71.0	70.0	72.7	76.0	82.0	84.4
Total paper/paper products (not printing)						
	23.3	22.0	23.2	21.5	22.4	22.5

Source: ABS, *Manufacturing Industry, Details of Operations*, Cat. No. 8203.0 (various years up to 1991).

Forest product industry sectors vary greatly by workplace size, capital equipment, employees, union coverage, nature of product market (including level of concentration) and management strategy.[11] Concentration of ownership varies markedly. Just eight firms dominate the pulp, paper and paper products industry (Hossain *et al.* 1989), while there are many small enterprises in the wood, wood products and furniture sectors, although some companies, such as CSR and Boral, are among Australia's largest. The case study companies reflect this variety.[12]

Employment in sawmilling varies between softwoods (with as many as two to three hundred workers) and hardwoods (averaging 15 employees).[13] However, as the wood products industry exhausts, and is restricted in its use (by political pressure) of, native hardwoods, softwood processing grows (Resource Assessment Commission, RAC, 1992a). Average workplace size has tended to rise and sawmill numbers fall. After a peak in the mid 1950s at 35,000 employees, in 1989 12,000 worked in the sawn timber sector and 11,000 in the resawn, plywood and panel sectors (RAC 1992a: 355-6).[14] South Australia, lacking significant native forests, developed softwood

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[11]   For instance, in 1988-89 the average number of employees per workplace in wood and wood products was 18 while in paper and paper products it was 83. Turnover per employee in wood and wood products was $105,500; in hardwood woodchips $459,300; and in paper and paper products, $200,300 (ABS 1991).

[12]   In 1985-86 more than three quarters of wood, wood products and furniture businesses had less than ten employees and 97 per cent had fewer than 50 workers (Rosser 1991: 1, from ABS 1988b).

[13]   In 1988-89, 588 log sawmilling establishments in Australia had an average of 21 employees (ABS 1991, table 3: 10). (Figures exclude single establishment enterprises employing fewer than four.) Softwoods are predominantly conifers, have greater uniformity and are easier to work than hardwoods.

[14]   In NSW, for instance, after a peak in the early 1950s post-war boom, small and medium sized mills were amalgamated or bought up by larger companies (Watson 1990: Chapter 1). Sawmill numbers peaked in 1954 at near 3200, falling to 1785 in 1990-91. Similarly, worker numbers declined (RAC 1992a: 355-6). This document uses Dargavel and Boutland 1988 ("Timber firms in the 20th century" in Dargavel (ed)

plantations early this century. Average workplace size is much larger than in New South Wales, with a large hardwood sawmilling sector. In 1990, 8,100 were employed in 578 timber processing plants in New South Wales while 2,800 worked in 22 South Australian plants (RAC 1992a: 89-103).[15] NSW's wider spread of timber industry workers makes it more difficult for the union to maintain its presence across NSW.

Notably, although Australia had relatively high unemployment through the 1980s, labour shortages occurred in some areas (Ewer *et al.* 1991: Chapter 3). This affected timber employers with nearly 60 per cent of surveyed hardwood sawmill managers reporting a significant labour shortage in the late 1980s, suggesting room for greater vocational training in this industry.[16] The above tables show jobs peaked in wood, wood products and furniture during 1988 to 1990. South Australian jobs in wood and wood products peaked in 1988-89, but then fell by about 15 per cent (to 4,148) up to 1991-92, with a similar drop nationally.[17] Assessing the relative influences of the early 1990s recession and industry structural change (such as technological change and product substitution) on job loss requires further research outside the scope of this project. However, as noted in Chapter Three, redundancies were widespread in the 1980s and early 1990s, coinciding with award restructuring. Timber industry employment variation has been influenced by economic fluctuations but within a long-term decline in industry jobs. Approaches to the timber industry's future developed in this context of long-term job losses and growing political pressure to curtail native forest harvesting.

The next section introduces the award restructuring approaches of the main groups in the industry. The Timber Workers' Union developed an interest in the industry's work organisation and skill formation practices, aiming to secure jobs in the industry.

5.4 Approaches to Timber Industry Award Restructuring

At the end of the 1980s award restructuring was seen by industry spokespeople as central to the industry's future, lending support to a DIR observation (DIR 1988: iv) that timber employers were interested in a more skilled workforce. The union became interested in award restructuring prior to the employers, seeing it as an opportunity to

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Sawing, selling and sons, ANU, Canberra) and ABARE 1992 (*Australian forest resources 1991,* AGPS, Canberra) as data sources.

[15]   These operations covered sawmills, panel board and plywood plants.

[16]   Survey of hardwood sawmills, "Factors Influencing Value Added Production in Hardwood Sawmilling"; (no date, Australian Manufacturing Council's publications list says 1990).

[17]   These figures include joinery and wooden structural fittings. Notably South Australian wood and wood products employment is significant compared to other major manufacturing industries at the end of the 1980s into the 1990s. Levels of turnover were similar to those in meat, and wine and brandy, while employment was around 1,500 higher in the wood sector (ABS *SA Year Book,* various years). By comparison, using these measures, the appliances and electrical sector was around twice as large.

encourage 'post-Fordist' style workplace change.[18] This section identifies the union and its approach, and the position of industry employers.

5.4.1 The Timber Workers' Union Work Change Aims

One union, the Australian Timber Workers Union (ATWU), dominated the timber industry in south-eastern Australia, although some tradespeople were members of other unions. Through the late 1980s and early 1990s the ATWU amalgamated with various unions, creating the Australian Timber and Allied Industries Union (ATAIU) in January 1991 with the Pulp and Paper Workers' Federation, soon followed by a series of amalgamations resulting in it becoming the Forest and Forest Products Division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining, Energy Union (CFMEU).[19] For simplicity's sake I use ATWU to indicate the timber workers' union. In 1989 it claimed more than 20,000 members.[20] About one third of wood, wood products and furniture workers were unionists in 1992, a lower union density than manufacturing's 44.4 per cent.[21] The wide dispersal of timber industry workplaces, especially in the eastern states, probably influences this union density.

From the mid 1980s, the ATWU pursued the ACTU led strategy of actively encouraging industry development, concerned about future employment prospects. Unions became more concerned with the production of wealth than its distribution. The ATWU SA secretary explained that his union's approach from the mid 1980s:

> was based on making companies more competitive, introducing flexibilities within the workplace which are beneficial to the workplace itself, and from the point of view of our members, we were looking at the opportunity for advancement, development of skills, and as a consequence of that, [increasing] remuneration (Interview, August 1992).

The ATWU developed proposals for award change before employers, dating its interest as beginning in 1986.[22] It attempted to 'set the agenda' for work and industrial relations change - quite a shift from its previous reactive stance (SA State Secretary, August 1992). This would appear to particularly apply to the NSW branch whose industry had the lowest number of industrial disputes of any industry in NSW from 1968 to 1982, suggesting an acquiescent union (Watson 1990: 146; endnote 10

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[18]   Similarly in the clothing industry, the union adopted a 'pro-active' stance over award restructuring (for instance, see Yeatman, with Bradley, 1992).

[19]   With the former Building Workers' Industrial Union, Miners Federation, Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association and the Federated Furnishing Trades Society. Interestingly, it has been suggested that award restructuring in the building industry followed a 'cost minimisation' approach (Curtain and Mathews 1990). Union amalgamates clearly do not necessarily concur on all issues, thus many amalgamations permit divisional autonomy.

[20]   In the 1989 Tripartite Timber Industry Mission's Award Restructuring Report (*The Way Forward*): 11.

[21]   August 1992: 25,200 workers in wood, wood products and furniture industry sectors were union members and 52,100 were not (ABS *Trade Union Members, Australia*, Cat. No. 6325.0 Tables 4 and 1).

[22]   In the ATWU's journal of December 1989, their Award Restructuring Co-ordinator stated that the union began restructuring its Federal Award in 1986. FTIA Chairman (sic) agreed about this, Interview, August 1992.

for Chapter 2).[23] From the mid 1980s the union articulated more concern about the industry's long term future, accepting changes were required. It advocated a high skills approach, dismantling award support for worker specialisation (part of the institutional framework keeping employees in repetitive and uninteresting jobs), encouraging workers to use more skills, increasing functional flexibility, constructing an award structure relating pay levels to worker skills rather than tasks performed, and including structured workplace consultation between management, employees and the union.[24] Employee training needed expansion to incorporate nationally accredited skill standards and greater access to career paths. A national, integrated system of skill recognition would potentially benefit employees by increasing their ability to change employers (Ewer *et al.* 1991).

Union officials identified the Accord and the ACTU/TDC *Australia Reconstructed* document as important in developing their changed approach.[25] They believed that, in general, management continued its short-sighted focus on short-term profit-making with little interest in creating internationally competitive operations with long-term investment.[26] As the union's restructuring handbook (p. 5, footnote 24) put it:

> Industry has failed to invest in the technology and research needed to ensure our products keep pace with competitions [sic] in the international marketplace. This failure has had drastic economic consequences for levels of employment and the quality of life.

For the union, the changing Australian and international economies meant production practices needed changing to create more competitive modern manufacturing operations to secure employment. The union argued for an industry development strategy that addressed resource availability, cost competitiveness, research and development, and domestic and international market development.[27] Adding more value to the raw material was critical, requiring investment in up-to-date technologies and more skilled workers to establish advanced manufacturing, although (as possibly implied by long-term trends) such investment could reduce workers. The ATWU sought wage increases within the Accord framework. Arguably, through award restructuring the

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[23]   Watson argues that in NSW from the 1940s to the 1980s the union alligned with sawmill owners in industry restructuring (reducing jobs) and disputes with conservationists over forests.

[24]   Union argued this to its workplace delegates in a 'Test Package' for a skill based grade structure in the milling and processing sectors circulated to ECCs in December 1991, produced by the ATWU's federal office.

[25]   Interviews with Timberworker Union officials (for example, SA State secretary, Quentin Cook) and union documents, such as its *Restructuring handbook,* distributed to union members in early 1989, (indicated by Federal Secretary in May 1989 issue of the union's journal, *The Australian Timber Worker:* 3), point out that the union's strategy follows the ACTU's as contained in *Australia Reconstructed.*

[26]   In this the union reflects the view that Australian industry has developed behind high tariff barriers with "relatively high wage levels" which has made "Australian industry uncompetitive internationally" (Curtain and Mathews 1990: "Two models of award restructuring in Australia", reprinted in Dabscheck et. al. (eds.) 1992: 434).

[27]   Federal Secretary in his report in the ATWU's November 1987 edition of its journal: 3.

ATWU also accommodated some business demands for more enterprise-specific work arrangements. The ATWU, like most Australian trade unions through the 1980s, did not only seek to maximise its members' material benefits, but, also accepted compromise with employers.

5.4.2 Award Restructuring and Employers

The peak employer group acknowledged that the initial stimulus for award restructuring came from the union, notably predating award restructuring becoming central in the AIRC National Wage Case of August 1988.[28] Also, award restructuring hastened employer co-ordination (Interview, FTIA chairman, September 1992). The Government provided funds to employers and unions to progress award restructuring and workplace reform. The ATWU funded a Work Change Adviser from this source but in order for employers to participate they needed formal co-ordination. Six employer associations from the south eastern States formed the Federation of Timber Industrial Associations (FTIA) in November 1988 to represent employers in "all matters associated with the restructuring of the *Federal Timber Industry Award*.[29] In April 1989, the FTIA appointed an Award Restructuring Co-ordinator/Traineeship Liaison Officer (using state financial assistance) and, also in this month, the employers first made proposals for award restructuring, suggesting a lack of interest in award restructuring.[30]

The FTIA believed workplace consultation would benefit companies by improving communication, encouraging worker ideas for production improvements, identifying training needs and increasing employee enterprise commitment (FTIA nd. a: 3). Elsewhere, the FTIA included "all award conditions" in a list of issues for award restructuring, implying the agenda should include more focus on costs than on workforce skills (FTIA nd. a).[31] It also suggested that greater scope to 'manage' was gained from the less prescriptive award conditions (FTIA nd. b).

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[28]   In May 1988 via a log of claims for wage increases based on award restructuring and/or industry reorganisation, followed by a June meeting, at the ACTU with the union and ACTU secretary, Bill Kelty, where the union presented a detailed plan for industry restructuring. (Interview with FTIA chairman (sic); FTIA documents including an address on award restructuring by FTIA Chairman.)

[29]   Previously employer groups convened prior to AIRC hearings to reach united positions on industrial issues. The FTIA claimed 952 member companies with around 24,000 employees. "Memorandum of Agreed Co-Operation Between the Timber Industry's Employer Associations", 9.11.88; signed by Timber Trade Industrial Association (TTIA) (members in New South Wales), Timber Merchants Association (Victoria), Victorian Sawmillers Association, Tasmanian Sawmillers Industrial Association, Tasmanian Logging Association Limited, and Timber Merchants Association of SA. Interview with chairman of FTIA, and FTIA documents (The Timber Mission 1989, *The Way Forward* , page 11).

[30]   Also suggested by the TTIA using the Work Organisation Branch of DIR to conduct a workshop on award restructuring for its officers in March 1989, (after which the TTIA conducted forums for its members); FTIA document "History of Award Restructuring in the Timber Industry" (covering events up to March 1992), page 5, no date.

[31]   Presented to a one day employer seminar.

5.5 Award Restructuring in the Timber Industry

This section discusses the progress of award restructuring in the timber industry and the related award changes. The August 1988 AIRC National Wage Case Decision (see Chapter Three) prescribed the 'structural efficiency principle' (SEP) that linked pay increases to union undertakings to fundamentally review their award/s. Having been working on restructuring for about two years, the ATWU was well prepared to give this pledge but employers had not, at that point, articulated a position and, more than that, disagreed among themselves. The Arbitration Commissioner dealing with the timber industry recognised that "a number of employer associations were nothing short of being obstructional" in respect of changing the *Timber Industry Award*, and because of this he was prepared to list any Timber Workers' Union application on the same day as the impending National Wage Case decision.[32] On August 31, 1988, the *Timber Industry Award* was varied to insert the SEP.

Co-ordination of employer views about work regulation was stimulated by the AIRC and the union developing its approach to work regulation and employee training. Prior to federating, the employer associations agreed with the union on an award review. Negotiations began in September 1988. It was agreed to establish a Timber Industry Award Restructuring National Co-ordinating/Consultative Committee with three working parties, following an ATWU proposed structure. The Co-ordinating Committee's objectives included enhancing domestic and international competition by increasing productivity and efficiency with "a more highly skilled and flexible work force". Employers indicated agreement to support paid leave for workplace union representatives to attend union award restructuring training. In December the employers and union agreed on an overseas timber industry study mission.

5.5.1 The Timber Mission

The Tripartite Timber Industry Mission, with government, union and employer representatives, visited timber producing countries in July 1989 to gain insight into the most productive timber industry practices around the world. Both the union and FTIA believed the mission was significant to award restructuring in the industry. It would assist award restructuring negotiations, informing these of timber industry developments internationally, focussing on successful overseas operations. In October the Mission released a report, *The Way Forward, Award Restructuring Report*, making 56 recommendations emphasising the use, regulation and training of labour.[33] Particular areas for evaluation included how new technology was introduced, changes

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32   AIRC Hearing, 19/7/88; Transcript: 20. Employer differences surfaced again before the AIRC in its arbitration of the grades structure for the milling and processing sector in 1992. Discussed below.

33   At page three of the Report, a Statement welcoming its production by the Minister for Industrial Relations is dated October 1989. Recommendations were grouped into five areas: consultation (7 recommendations), demarcation (3), management and work organisation (9), classification and career paths (11), training and skill formation (26).

to job classifications, career paths, employee training/skill formation, work and management organisation and consultative practices. The *Report* recommended flatter organisational structures, more consultation with employees, reducing the authoritarian role of supervisors and giving workers more decision making input into production issues. An award structure based on skills competence rather than task performance was supported, implying a nationally co-ordinated and recognised training system.

5.5.2 Continuing Structural Efficiency

The August 1989 National Wage Case continued the SEP, but the AIRC wanted award parties to pursue fundamental reviews of their awards, introduce measures to improve efficiency and create more fulfilling and rewarding jobs (AIRC 1989b; Chapter Three above). It expected new classification structures would be part of the approach to improving structural efficiency in many areas, commending the metal industry approach of testing a new classification structure before changing the award (AIRC 1989b: 8). The ATWU aimed to develop a new classification structure for testing. Protracted negotiations between the union and FTIA failed to reach agreement (with arbitration in late 1991), although other award changes introduced greater functional flexibility, increased capacity to vary some award conditions, and encouraged workplace consultation (as is discussed in the following sections).

The *Timber Industry Consolidated Award* was varied to meet the second SEP by inserting a new clause with three main parts in October 1989.[34] The union claimed it was the first to achieve these pay increases.[35] The ATWU's New South Wales branch secretary noted that the decision abolished pay differences between the States covered by the award, by applying the minimum rates adjustment principle.[36]

5.5.3 Increased Functional Flexibility

One of the three main sub-clauses inserted in the *Award* to fulfil requirements of the second SEP decision, "Flexibility", required workers to "perform a wider range of duties including work ... incidental or peripheral to their main tasks or functions". Training would support wider duties: "Subject to agreement at the enterprise level, employees are to undertake training for the wider range of duties and for access to

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34   Detailed in AIRC Print J0043, Order from the AIRC, 27 October 1989, inserting new clause 6A. This became clause 8 b, c and d in the renamed *Timber Industry Award 1990* (AIRC 1990b), May.

35   The Federal Secretary of the ATWU (December 1989 issue of the union's journal, *The Australian Timber Worker*: 3). Also stated by the FTIA's chairman (Interview, September 1992).

36   ATWU, NSW Branch, *Award Restructuring* report. The *Timber Industry Consolidated Award* was varied to effect the first available minimum rates adjustment on 19 January 1990 (AIRC Decision relating to the Timber Award, 12 February, AIRC 1990a: 1). Early 1990 was the earliest of these (AIRC 1989b: 21). The resulting weekly pay increase from the first minimum rate adjustment varied between States and classification groups. Timber industry tradespersons would reach the AIRC minimum tradespersons' rate in June 1991. For tradespersons in SA the total increase in the minimum award rate would be $27.50 a week, whereas in NSW (where largest rise occurred) the increase would be $42.90 (AIRC 1990a, Annexure A).

higher classifications".[37] The award parties agreed to "not create barriers to advancement of employees within the award" and, in principle, to move to a new award with less specific function descriptions. This issue became particularly divisive. While the union wanted pay linked to acquired skills, most employers wanted to retain the connection between pay and tasks performed, not perceiving a need for more broadly skilled workers.

5.5.4 Enterprise Flexibility Provision

Award variations made under the second SEP gave employers two ways for varying award conditions. An "Award Modernisation" sub-clause (the second major change to the award at this time) committed the union to create an award that allows "more flexible working arrangements, improves the quality of working life, enhances skills and job satisfaction and will assist positively in the restructuring process" (AIRC 1990b: 20). Together with testing a new award structure, the union undertook to discuss employer proposals for increased flexibility. This clause permitted award change within enterprise agreements, thereby conceding greater enterprise determination of work arrangements, although several conditions had to be met. No employee would lose income; a majority of employees "must genuinely agree"; the union had to be party to the agreement but it could not withhold assent "unreasonably"; the AIRC would approve agreements; and if agreement was not possible the award's disputes procedure would be invoked.

These conditions parallel those in other awards described by the AIRC in its April 1991 National Wage Case Decision. However, the timber award did not state that enterprise agreements would not include provisions below national standards as others did (AIRC 1991a: 43-44). Where there were inconsistencies, such agreements would override the award provided relevant conflicting award clauses were specified.

5.5.5 Consultative Committees

The other way to vary award conditions was via the third sub-clause added at this time, "Workplace Consultation", that recommended workplace consultative mechanisms be created, which the union and AIRC called 'enterprise consultative committees' (ECCs).[38] However, rules and procedures facilitating "equal" management and employee participation were required: "employees shall be represented at least equally on the committee by its elected union delegates" or by a

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[37]   This perhaps does not clearly convey that an employee should not have to perform duties for which they are not adequately trained. The April 1991 National Wage Case continued the application of the structural efficiency principle, and included that employees could be directed to perform "such duties as are within the limits of the employee's skill, competence and training" (AIRC 1991a: 65).

[38]   Teicher (1992b: 476) notes that the AIRC's 1988 structural efficiency principle was pursued in many cases with agreements for "the establishment of joint consultative mechanisms to address issues such as the introduction of new technology, training, and more flexible working arrangements".

method agreed between management, employees and the union, and once set up "the parties may, by agreement, vary the application of designated award conditions" (AIRC 1990b, Clause 8, d). Annual leave, part-time and casual work, ordinary hours of work, payment methods and sick leave were negotiable.[39] The union retained the right to advise its members on award matters, recommending unionists seek union advice.[40] Employers gained access to more flexibility in labour use and enterprise specific arrangements (especially over aspects of working time), showing, the union claimed, its willingness to meet employer demands for 'flexibility' and company level working arrangements.

5.5.6 Employer Association Support For Consultation

The FTIA chairman supported consultation. He suggested the timber award was the only one with such a consultative clause, claiming this showed it was probably the most advanced in award restructuring (Interview, September 1992). Whether or not this view is tenable, it suggests employers moving from non-interest to actively seeking influence over award restructuring's development. Intimating some of the tensions over workplace consultation, the Timber Mission reported that of overseas timber operations the "most efficient and adaptable enterprises ... were those committed to consultation between management and unions", but this would not "substitute for management's authority to manage its business or take responsibility for the final decisions" (Timber Mission Report 1989: 19, 12, Recommendation 5). What should be the content of such consultation? The award's "workplace consultation" provision encouraged consultation, but, similarly, managerial prerogative was acknowledged (AIRC 1990b, *Timber Industry Award 1990*; Clause 8, d, iii: 20). Some FTIA inconsistency was suggested by its advice to employers, implying labour cost minimisation was primary (see 5.4.2 above), and its support for the Mission Report, suggesting emphasis on greater employee skill (FTIA nd. d). How employer consultative practices changed is explored below.

Employer notions of consultation were more limited than the union's. The FTIA recommended employers consider five questions that "should be addressed by management first and foremost to set directions for the organisation", although it also advised worker input on "operational issues" (FTIA nd. a: 1-2). Management needed to determine the consultative processes it preferred "to make the most of the flexibility provisions of the Award" and identify measures for improving efficiency.[41] The FTIA

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39   The FTIA's *Timber Industry Award Restructuring Implementation Manual*: 10, lists these items; as does the union's *ECC Manual For Union Representatives*, (1992: 7.3).

40   CFMEU, Forest and Forest Products Division, *ECC Manual For Union Representatives*.

41   The FTIA's award restructuring manual advises employers that the 1991 National Wage Case "indicated that all awards should have a contract of employment clause similar to" one laid out in the manual that has three parts, primarily enabling an employer to direct an employee to carry out a wider range of duties, provided the worker has proper training for such duties (original emphasis, p.6).

acknowledged that management's interest in consultation had been undeveloped: "Many organisations will not have concerned themselves with such an emphasis on communication/consultation in the past" (FTIA nd. a: 2), apparently agreeing with the union that ECCs could improve management communication with employees and encourage workforce input on enterprise issues, and that business would benefit.

5.5.7 Union View of Workplace Consultation

For the ATWU, ECCs would address various issues including employee training and skills development; work organisation and work practices; management techniques; organisation change; product issues; equal employment opportunities; and technological change, and they would increase productivity by improving workplace decision making processes, workplace communication, and trust between workers and management.[42] Establishing formal workplace consultative committees was a source of friction between the ATWU and employers. Union officials, and some workplace union members, saw timber industry management as conservative on employee consultation: "we've got this die hard attitude from management where we're in the position of management so therefore we manage" (ATWU SA State secretary, Interview, August 1992)[43]. Union officials asserted that managers' short-term planning hindered the industry's economic potential.[44]

Often management and employees say an "open door" policy is followed whereby workers can walk into a manager's office any time to discuss work problems.[45] For some managers this is as far as consultation need go, but the union believed worthwhile workplace consultation could not be based on such informal arrangements because they are too much at management's whim. Meaningful consultation needed a formalised structure detailing procedures such as chairing meetings (the union recommended a rotating chair); time for preparation and communication with workers; access to relevant company information; decision making capability for the committee; office bearers for, and their roles within, the committee; etcetera (ATAIU 1992).[46] Unless such a committee was established, the union would not agree to an enterprise's proposed variation of award clauses. "It is a

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[42]   This paragraph is based on interviews with union officials, and union documents, particularly the CFMEU, Forest and Forest Products Division, *ECC Manual For Union Representatives*.

[43]   Among workers interviewed some believed this of their management, although, interestingly, contradictory views were put by individual workers, illustrated in comments of Shop Stewards interviewed in the following section, 5.6.

[44]   Union officials (SA secretary, Work Change Officer, July/August 1992) cited a large company laying off workers, and then re-hiring them a fortnight later as an example of incompetent, short term management.

[45]   According to the AWIRS (Callus et. al. 1991: 269, Table A41, "Management approach/philosophy to managing employees") an open door approach was the third most prevalent (across all workplaces with 20 or more employees) of management employee relations practices. It was used at 17 per cent of workplaces, behind "teamwork/consultation" (33 per cent), and a "personal approach" (35 per cent). In manufacturing the respective figures were 19, 30 and 39. Larger workplaces used the team-work or consultative approach more than smaller workplaces, as did public workplaces compared to private.

[46]   One of the forms of the ATWU in the early 1990s resulting from union amalgamations.

firm belief of the Union that to achieve part of the goals set for Award Restructuring, members must become involved in the decision making process at the enterprise level" (ATWU Award Restructuring Co-ordinator in *The Australian Timber Worker*, Dec. 1989: 7).[47]

5.5.8 Development of Consultative Committees

At the time of this research, ECCs were not as numerous as the union had hoped. Few employers developed consultative committees as the award recommended, resisting consultation that included union involvement, (see 5.6 below). A representative of the TTIA (Timber Trade Industrial Association, NSW's major timber industry employer group) claimed there were just ten or twelve ECCs among his four hundred member companies.[48] Union initiatives influenced creating ECCs, the union claiming that:

> In all circumstances it's been necessary for the union to apply or exert pressures and exert influence on management either directly, through industrial activity, or through the involvement in the workplace of the ECC reps pushing the barrow [that is, raising demands for consultation]" (SA State Secretary, Interview, August 1992).[49]

As noted above, the nature of the timber industry varies between Australian States. South Australia, with fewer and larger workplaces, had more workplace ECCs than NSW, likely related to NSW's more widespread timber industry[50] (Interview, ATWU SA Secretary). Differences between the TTIA and other timber employer groups surfaced in late 1991 in AIRC hearings over classification structure proposals for the timber award.

5.5.9 Classification Structure Change

Timber industry award restructuring permitted more worker functional flexibility, recommended a process to achieve such changes, specified conditions

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[47]   In his report on award restructuring, the secretary of the NSW branch of the union drew attention to the Overseas Timber Mission's recommendation 1: "the concept of consultation be accepted as part of award restructuring in the Timber Industry, and that it be accepted as essential to the process of positive industry development".

[48]   TTIA claimed to cover 17,500 employees, nearly three quarters of the FTIA's coverage (representative of TTIA at AIRC hearing, C no. 50225 of 1991: 53-4, carried over into 1992, in which the Commissioner was asked to arbitrate several matters between the *Timber Industry Award, 1990* parties. Central was a new award structure for the milling and processing sector of the timber industry. See next sub-section).

[49]   Perhaps it is worth noting that industrial action does not always persuade management to accept union demands. A major national office-furniture manufacturer, owned by a large multi-national, was subject to union pressure for about two years, (from ATWU and FFTS, Federated Furnishing Trades Society) including workforce-imposed work restrictions, to establish an ECC in an Adelaide plant. Workplace management resisted the pressure, making use of a long-standing friction among workers along union membership and work area lines, until the Adelaide plant was closed, re-locating machinery to Sydney. (Interviews ATWU SA Secretary; Workplace Shop Steward, September 1992.)

[50]   Also, NSW has many more small firms than South Australia that are quite likely owned and run by former sub-contractors and others with strong individualist values not predisposing them to close relations with unions (see Watson 1990).

permitted variation, and encouraged workplace consultation (Clauses 8 b, c, d). The other major, especially union, agenda of award restructuring was classification structure change implying vocational education and training, career structure, pay level determination and work organisation change, over which there were many disagreements.

Like the Metal Industry Award, the *Timber Industry Consolidated Award* (preceded by the *Timber Industry Award 1990*) had numerous classifications, in this case over two hundred.[51] The union and the FTIA (and various employers) disagreed over the number of levels in the new award and their definition. The differing characteristics and production requirements of timber industry sectors were used as a rationale for addressing sectors individually. Through 1991 the ATWU and FTIA negotiated over the milling and processing sector, disagreeing over the number of award levels.[52] The FTIA argued that classification level descriptions should include specific tasks, while the union wanted more general descriptions of the skills required to perform work. In December 1991 the ATWU decided to go ahead with workplace 'testing' of the grade structure it had developed and the FTIA sought AIRC arbitration. Employer discord emerged, with the AIRC Commissioner commenting that the union and employers worked together successfully for long periods,[53] but when disagreements arose they were "deep and significant", and the "degree of differences generally are manifested by the division between the various employer interests" (AIRC 1992a: 1). The TTIA agreed with some union proposals (co-operating with 'testing' the proposed structure involving a 'paper' exercise identifying workers' positions in the new structure according to their existing skills), while other employers were strongly opposed (AIRC 1992a).

The union proposed a time limited training grade be the first level, meaning that workers would no longer be stuck in the lowest level.[54] The AIRC accepted this approach against employer complaints that this presumed all workers wanted a career path, whereas some may wish to remain labourers. Otherwise the AIRC sided with the employers, deciding on six levels for the award (although it noted employers could pay above the award).[55] The union argued several classifications should be upgraded because of significant multi-skilling.

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[51]   In New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania these were divided into ten groups, designated A to J, and in South Australia there were eight, A to H.

[52]   The union proposed seven levels and the FTIA six. (Arbitration hearing over a grades structure for the milling and processing sector of the industry, AIRC, Transcript of Hearing, Commissioner Merriman, C No 50225 of 1991, *Timber Industry Award 1990.*)

[53]   Reflecting comments of DIR in 1988.

[54]   Discussion based on above AIRC decision, a *Test Package* (produced by the Federal Office of the union in November 1991, ATAIU 1991), circulated to workplaces for them to test how employees would fit into the proposed skill based grade structure; and interviews with union and employers' representatives.

[55]   The AIRC did this by adding an "Appendix M" to the award: "A Transitional Guide To Classification and Skill Level Definitions For The Milling and Processing Sector" (Print K2672). It added the proviso that this was a minimum rates award and employers could pay above the award.

As in the *Metal Industry Award*, in this case the AIRC inserted an indicative task schema in the award's level descriptions, thereby rejecting the union's aim of worker competencies being central in the classification system. For the ATWU this was functionally restrictive, and probably unfair as the same function may involve different levels of responsibility at separate workplaces (Interview, ATWU Work Change Officer, July 1992). The union argued that level descriptions should include specified skill competencies and be linked to training system change that increased workers' access to nationally accredited training. The union's desire for a national system of skill acquisition and recognition was contrary to the aims of business groups, such as the BCA, that wanted an enterprise focus in employee training to meet the asserted specificity of individual enterprises (Ewer *et al.* 1991).

The union had limited success in winning employers over to its view of increasing employee skills and the industry's future. Employers evidently did not support ECCs that would address various issues from work organisation, through product selection to managerial performance. This section showed that in the timber industry the union was the initiator of award restructuring, and that it found some support from employer representative organisations.

5.6 Workplace Change and Award Restructuring

In this section the impact of the early implementation of award restructuring and other significant employee management strategies is examined. It firstly presents descriptions of individual company and workplace industrial relations experiences. This is followed by a summary highlighting major points which emerge from the research, covering a relatively short period of the later 1980s and early 1990s. Evaluation of the long term effects of award restructuring could only be limited as the workplace research ended in mid 1993.

5.6.1 Individual Companies

CSR Limited is a major building and construction materials company with large operations in wood products, sugar and aluminium (in Australia, North America, New Zealand and Asia). In the early 1990s recession demand fell for building products, increasing market competition. CSR's timber operations were reportedly non-profitable in 1991, although CSR acquired businesses during the year. Employees in its timber products division increased by 8 per cent or nearly 300 (to 3,794) in the year to March 31 1992 (CSR 1992), contrasting with other CSR operations. Efficiency was also increased.[56]

By the early 1990s Japanese management techniques influenced Western

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[56]   1537 retrenchments and an overall cut of 4 per cent or 880 workers in the year. CSR's Annual Report (up to 31.3.1992) claimed that production cost per square metre of dressed timber fell 6 per cent from 1991 to 1992 at its Lakeside Mill in SA's south east, significant with moves to relate pay to productivity.

business. CSR developed a total quality management (TQM) program called 'Building In Quality'[57] and an employee share option plan. Japanese influence (encouraging employees to improve production) is further suggested by CSR's Managing Director, stating that the company aimed "to make sure that everyone, at all levels in the company, is oriented to the continuous improvement of processes, products and service to meet customer needs and reduce costs" (CSR 1992). TQM included that employees should aim to satisfy their customers, whether inside or outside the company. CSR Softwoods (one of two CSR timber businesses, CSR Wood Panels was the other) conducted an employee survey in 1992 to identify views about working for CSR and how to improve customer relationships, encouraging employees to feel valued.[58] In the recession, achieving customer satisfaction would at least maintain, hopefully increase, market share. Management was uneasy with the suggestion, however, that employee responsibility to 'customers' could imply that managers were accountable to workers in that aspects of their work affected worker performance (Interview, ATWU Work Change Officer, July 1992).

There is much debate about the impact of new technologies on work. An emphasis on reducing labour costs is suggested by CSR Softwoods' use of an efficiency meter that enabled management and supervisors to monitor a particular moulder (a Weinig 22B: Reid 1992). Management saw it as a tool facilitating enhanced cost and stock control.[59] Capital investment can reduce labour requirements. Interestingly, CSR modernised its Caboolture (in the south-east of South Australia) sawmill with $10 million investment, and maintained production levels even though one shift replaced two (Wooster 1991).

CSR wanted to establish a 'Building In Quality' initiative separate from the workplace consultative mechanism recommended in the award.[60] The union argued it did not object to improving quality but claimed the established ECCs could do this. CSR appeared to want more effective control over issues addressed in the workplace by avoiding union scrutiny.

This brief description of the employee management approach of a major Australian timber industry company suggests that its management did not pursue the high skill version of award restructuring, although greater employee consultation was desired. The union criticised establishing another structure for workplace consultation, arguing that the award restructuring 'flexibility' clauses provided employers with

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[57]   Company executives received training for this in the USA.

[58]   CSR Softwoods 'Report To All Employees On The Results Of The 1992 Employee Survey'. A four page document, stating it had 1,148 survey responses from employees, representing a high response rate of 82.4%.

[59]   Reid also mentioned a "unimeter" from Technology Park, Adelaide, able to measure various factors and connect with a personal computer making it "a sophisticated real time production and machine monitor, data logger, and chart recorder. This feature provided management and supervisory staff with a powerful tool to monitor virtually any production process in real time" (Reid 1992: 31).

[60]   Company documents; interviews, ATWU Work Change Officer and SA secretary (July 1992).

access to modifying work arrangements to raise productivity.

At an Adelaide work-site of a large conglomerate (Company G), some worker representatives believed the ECCs in Company G only existed because management thought they were compulsory. They claimed decisions made in the ECC were in the company's favour, for instance by spreading ordinary work hours, reducing the application of penalty rates and cutting a night shift.[61] The company used the "Workplace Consultation" clause, establishing an ECC. Also at this time, there were many retrenchments (Interview C, August 1992). Another view was that the company supplied little money for employee suggestions from the ECC. However, one worker representative believed the ECC addressed both employee and company needs: "It's [the ECC's objective] generally how to improve production, safety, and the well being of the workers" (Interview C, August 1992).

At Company A (a medium sized manufacturer in Adelaide, owned by a large corporation) the timber union was perceived to be militant, as it was not prepared to accommodate management's proposal for a 'temporary' reduced work week, claimed to be necessary for operational survival.[62] The manager believed other workplace unions were reasonable as they accepted the company proposals. He argued that most unions now, particularly at the senior official level, appreciated that companies needed to make profits for job security, but the ATWU maintained a traditionally antagonistic attitude to management. Timber workers' opposition meant the proposal was not implemented, but the threatened lay offs did not occur, although timber workers were dramatically reduced over time, a trend happily reported by the manager.

This manager believed setting up consultation was protracted in all companies, and in this case the ECC did not produce useful results. Award restructuring's main benefit was that it brought the workplace's three unions together, reducing demarcation issues. Much more interest was shown in enterprise bargaining. The manager reported a fifty per cent increase in productivity for the previous financial year but he felt further productivity rises would be very difficult to achieve, believing wage increases under the April 1991 National Wage Case Decision had to be related to productivity increases (Manager, Company A, August 1992). His notion of productivity was based on a company quantitative measure relating labour use to output. Award restructuring's skill enhancing potential was not very relevant because the work was low-skill: "the job that we are requiring them [workers] to do is very much process work". Training was not necessary. However, he also stated that "the biggest problem in the workforce is the lack of training" (Manager, Company A, August 1992). A major problem with the ECC was that it required shop-floor workers to adopt a new role, addressing larger workplace issues: "The boys (sic) have a few problems appreciating the magnitude of

[61]   Workers' representatives at union training for ECC representatives (March 1992).

[62]   Interview at the workplace with manager (August 1992). Interview, ATWU SA secretary (September 1992); and information from workers at ATWU training seminar (March 1992).

the problems/issues which they are being asked to address in the consultative committee" (Manager, Company A, August 1992). A source of tension for workers' identifying work improvements, he thought, was that they understood higher productivity would reduce jobs.

Other factors impacted on this company's recent history. Four years previously, a large national company took it over, 'rationalising' Adelaide operations by consolidating two sites into one. Many jobs were cut in the production and white collar workforces. Production layout was redesigned and the just-in-time approach was introduced, reducing stock levels by four to five times. The manager's approach to award restructuring, and to workplace change generally, more closely matched a 'cost minimisation' approach than one based on increasing employees' skills to enhance efficient production. (The categorisation was suggested by Curtain and Mathews, 1990, discussed above in Chapter Three).

The manager of an Adelaide building products firm (Company B, March 1992) was also concerned about workers' ability to identify ways to raise productivity, believing production workers (about fifty employees in this case) lacked understanding of the new workplace consultation arrangements, although he conceded that some managers also did not understand and were afraid of change. On the other hand, the union argued that workers were well informed from union training sessions, seemingly supported as some managers also wished to attend them (ATWU SA secretary, September 1992).

However, this managements attitude to award restructuring and employee participation changed. In early 1992 the manager believed the workplace's ECC, operating for about a year, was not very useful. At that time the union and workers' representatives on the ECC were critical of the company's approach to the ECC.[63] They claimed the company did not use the ECC over Christmas 1991 when the company decided to sell part of the operation. Management informed the ECC in late January of its decision to sell part of the operation, saying it would consult the ECC and affected employees on implementing the decision. An ECC meeting three months earlier reported an external study's findings of the operational area in question, identifying the option management adopted over Christmas. The incident suggests a traditional managerial approach to decision making prerogatives - that consultation meant significant decisions were made by management with workforce representatives informed subsequently.

In mid 1992 this company became more interested in employee participation. Negotiations over enterprise bargaining neared completion. The manager was more positive about the ECC, seeing potential for workers to contribute ideas on

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[63]   Workers' representatives, ATWU ECC training programme (March 1992). Interviews with company Shop Steward, factory foreperson, and union secretary (September 1992).

productivity: "it will be good". He now supported multi-skilling because it would increase functional flexibility and create more interesting work. He also believed enterprise bargaining pay increases were dependent on demonstrated productivity growth.[64] The union saw this committee as similar to others in that it mostly dealt with fairly petty, though long-standing issues, such as work area lighting, materials stacking, storage of completed jobs, and minor adjustments to machinery. Benefits to occupational health and safety were identified (Union Work Change Officer, July 1992).

This management's approach was influenced by being part of a large multi-sector, national corporation with various operations, some of which had received publicity for consultative practices and production organisation changes reputedly increasing productivity, for instance by reducing waste, disbanding a single production line and creating production teams. The parent company interest in participatory management practices was increasingly manifest in this operation. Line management received more training in personnel management, with its role changing from imposing discipline to leading and facilitating employee effort (Interviews, Shop Steward and Supervisor, September 1992). The changed workplace environment was illustrated by the Supervisor and Shop Steward working together to resolve workforce tensions.[65] In one incident over changing the monthly rostered day off (RDO), the company used the ECC to seek variation of the relevant award provision, but was not satisfied with the workers' proposal. The Shop Steward and Supervisor claimed they advised management it would be more successful by accepting the workers' compromise, and 'revisit' the issue later. The Supervisor also explained that management already could vary individual worker's RDOs and workers were prepared to alter their hours to fit the company's production demands.

At this workplace the ECC structure was changed in mid 1992 - several ECCs were set up covering distinct production areas. Both the Shop Steward and Supervisor believed this structure facilitated far more employee participation and more effective workplace performance improvements (Interviews, Shop Steward and Supervisor, September 1992). Individual work groups discussions would produce more effective participation from workers cynical about the process or lacking public speaking confidence. From the union's point of view there was some danger in workers offering too much workplace knowledge at once, thereby reducing potential for wage increases in a wage fixing system linking pay and productivity. It was notable that management's approach to the ECC process changed when it foresaw productivity

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[64]   The manager's enthusiasm for enterprise bargaining was due to its recording of work performance, measuring it again six months later to establish the magnitude of productivity improvement.

[65]   For example, if a worker was doing something "wrong" (e.g. not working correctly), instead of the supervisor "chewing out" (reprimanding) the worker (as was the norm previously), he would have a word to the shop steward, who would then have a "quiet word" to the worker suggesting they were behaving unacceptably.

gains arising from workers discussing workplace performance. At this workplace there was some increase in workers operating a wider range of machinery, but the Shop Steward and Supervisor believed there was not a great change in the distribution of work.

5.6.2 Smaller Timber Operations

In small timber operations there was less use of formalised consultation structures and less formalised industrial relations in general. In a small timber merchant operation (Company D, recently merged with a timber importer but maintaining some timber machining and about twelve factory employees), a consultative committee had not yet been set up, and neither had a workplace health and safety committee (Interview, Shop Steward, August 1992). The manager was reported to have said he did not have time, although he was prepared to implement a consultative structure as proposed by his employers' association, the Timber Merchants Association. The Shop Steward believed the employer was fair as long as you were "reasonable with him", although he wondered if the manager's resistance to setting up an ECC and displeasure about the Shop Steward attending a union ECC training course was due to a concern about having a well informed workforce. The manager was seen as being opposed to workers becoming more involved in workplace decision making: "Unfortunately management sometimes doesn't see that point of view. Whether they feel threatened because we might know too much, I don't know. It could be that" (Interview, Shop Steward, August 1992).

It was reported that this company increased training by sending a supervisor to a 'train the trainer' course, for that person to train workers on-site. The main change to work was that workers had increased the breadth of their work skills by learning to operate more machines, enabling management to more easily replace absent workers and reduce production schedule disruption. However, job rotation was not systematic. Work monotony was lessened by relatively low volume jobs that did not require workers to work as repetitively as previously, although the range of operations was small. Company D's merger with a timber importer reduced its timber machining. In the Shop Steward's view, workers benefited from more knowledge and from improving their future work prospects. Notably, management proposed to change the spread of working hours. According to the Shop Steward, management wanted a four day working week of 38 hours with no rostered days off. Most public holidays would be unpaid as they would fall on a non-working day (a Monday).

The scope of the work in this business was fairly limited. The same was said for a small manufacturer of roof trusses by its Shop Steward (Company E: about eight factory employees; Interview E, August 1992). Both this Shop Steward and the previous interviewee believed increased training was positive, but it was difficult to see

more interesting work, given machinery and operations limitations. This company was also said to be interested in reducing the working week to four days. The Shop Steward had an ambivalent attitude to this proposal. He supported the union's push for greater training, and supported union membership, for its protection of employment rights. However, he believed (as did Company D's Shop Steward) that the union needed to be flexible about award conditions. Company E's Shop Steward claimed union officials opposed a four day working week, but he allowed it for three months as this was appropriate to the business' difficult situation. (The Union secretary claimed to know this case and to have approved the award variation: Interview, September 1992). The Shop Steward thought this workplace was good at maintaining machinery, thereby benefiting workers and the employer by reducing mistakes and accidents. Workers were able to perform most operations, increasing their functional flexibility, but there was little move to create more meaningful work. An increase in workforce training was evident in workers attending forklift driving refresher courses. In this Shop Steward's opinion, the industry's skills problem was that older workers were not passing on their knowledge to younger workers.

A change in working hours to 37.5 hours a week and suspending the rostered day off was reported for another small to medium sized timber merchant (Company F, around thirty employees: Interview Shop Steward, August 1992). A major organisational change had occurred in this company when it acquired a sawmilling operation. The Shop Steward also believed that unions should be flexible in their insistence on award conditions and develop more co-operation with management because of the changing economy. However, he also described a recent industrial dispute over the company deciding to lay off two workers who were on holidays. He claimed to have convinced other workers this was unfair and they should take industrial action, stopping material movement between two company worksites. The company changed its position, supposedly within a couple of hours. He believed this action, and a couple of others, showed employees the value of union membership and also revealed management incompetence in poor treatment of, and communication with, employees. The episode suggests industrial award application is influenced by both management and employee action and that it is incorrect to argue that work regulation in Australia is rigidly and inflexibly determined by Industrial Commissions (Drago *et al.* 1992). It suggests that the application of award conditions can vary and that those often assumed to be inflexible (unions and workers) can accommodate demands to vary the award.

5.6.3 Summary

The following tables summarise aspects of industrial relations and workplace change in the company case studies. Table 5.4 lists some of the major changes in the

late 1980s and early 1990s in these companies, changes in ownership structure being notable.[66] Table 5.4 summarises employer award restructuring approaches, showing interest in limiting costs, opposition to the union aim of a nationally integrated skill acquisition and accreditation system, and support for limited employee training. These two tables suggest employer interest in cost-minimising policies rather than productivity enhancing strategies (Curtain and Mathews 1990).

Table 5.3 Company workplace change initiatives

Company A	-taken over by national company -two worksites rationalised into one, redundancies -reorganise factory layout -Just-In-Time: reduce stock levels -50 per cent productivity increase -desire to reduce working hours -employee share ownership scheme
Company B	-acquired two operations in previous 3 years -national company acquired it 5-6 years ago
Company C	-new management structure, workforce halved 18 months previously
Company D	-recently merged
Company G	-total quality management separate to award consultative provisions -increase spread of ordinary hours -employee share ownership scheme[67]

Table 5.4 Company Attitude to Award Restructuring

Company A	-sceptical of employee capacities -slow to set up -encourage union co-ordination -high skill workers not required -raised productivity would reduce jobs
Company B	-initially sceptical of employee capacities -interested in enterprise bargaining -parent company embrace consultative practices to improve company work -wanted re-direct RDO use (already flexible taking of RDOs) -multi-skilling increase functional flexibility -more forklift, 'train the trainer' and on-site training -strike over enterprise bargaining
Company C	-sceptical; concerned about immediate market conditions
Company D	-no ECC (or health and safety committee) -follow employer association advice -supervisor 'train the trainer', then train workplace operators -workers could perform more tasks; replace absent workers
Company E	-forklift refresher training -workers could do range of tasks
Company G	-complicated, too slow, arduous -more important matters to deal with/ enterprise bargaining interest

Table 5.5 is from a survey of enterprise consultative committees (ECC)

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[66]   A more extensive study of the question of changing ownership structure was beyond the scope of this study but would no doubt be very interesting.

[67]   Note that other large companies with wood and wood products business interests have employee share ownership plans, for example Boral, Email, BTR Nylex.

minutes. The table shows issues that arose in ECCs suggesting management often used ECCs to communicate 'disciplinary' information to employees, like warnings about workplace damage, punctuality, time wasting, safety practices and efficiency. Work hours, holidays and rostered day off arrangements were also discussed, and work groups were set up. Workers were urged to provide ideas on improving production layout, processes and organisation. ECCs considered various issues, including occupational health and safety questions. Health and safety committees were meant to address this area, although separate workplace committees could be combined Interview, ATWU SA secretary, September 1992.) The workplace research showed employer interest in changing working hours, especially extending ordinary hours, and reducing penalty and shift pay rates.

Table 5.5 Issues at consultative committees[68]

General	-lighting in work areas
	-stacking of materials, storage of completed jobs
	-adjustments to machinery, including preventative maintenance
	-production efficiency, performance; reports - more effort required
	-worker attitude; dirty lunchroom/toilet; absenteeism; time-wasting
	-worker ideas for improving productivity
	-set up work teams
	-spread of working hours; overtime access; holidays; RDOs
	-anti-smoking;
	-safe work practices (e.g: wearing safety equipment, forklift driving)
Company B	-initially small matters
	-with enterprise bargaining created several work area groups; produced useful changes to site layout etc.
Company C	-extend ordinary hours (vary award)
Company D	-wanted 4 day, 38 hour week
Company E	-introduce 4 day week for 3 months
Company F	-introduce 37.5 hour week, suspend RDO (rostered day off)

Employers were not as interested in award restructuring or workplace consultation as the union, complaining about the time it took and its limited benefits (for example, Manager, May 1992). Workplace consultation did not excite much employer interest, although managers began to see potential benefits from workplace consultation where workers would be encouraged to contribute ideas on improving enterprise performance, somewhat modifying hierarchical Taylorist-Fordist practice. Clearly their vision was more limited than the union's: managers did not countenance consultative committees with significant input into major workplace decisions. The workplace research suggests management interest in employee participation via company quality improvement schemes and share ownership schemes. Management policy appears critical to the form of workplace consultation established.

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[68]   This table constructed from ECC minutes of 8 companies (for different periods, covering from early 1990 to early 1992), and reports from workplace research.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed award restructuring in the Australian timber industry. Did award restructuring contribute to changing work organisation and making work more skilled and rewarding? Did industrial relations become more co-operative? Were workplaces made more democratic by award restructuring? Pursuit of award restructuring was a central response of Australian unions to economic and industrial relations pressures in the late 1980s, a tactic to focus attention on functional flexibility rather than other dimensions of flexibility detrimental to workers. The timber workers union (ATWU) pursued this path, aiming for more rewarding work and improved career paths, believing that "[m]ost workers under the Timber Industry Award have never enjoyed a career path or undertaken formal skills training" (ATWU Award Restructuring Co-ordinator, *The Australian Timber Worker*, December 1989: 7).

The 1989 overseas Tripartite Timber Mission focussed on successful European firms, highlighting their co-operative and higher skilled 'post-Fordist' workplaces. The union clearly supported the productivity enhancing post-Fordist model and there was also some support from employer representatives: but from employers, especially smaller operations, there was more interest in reducing labour and its associated costs, reflecting the two broad approaches of productivity enhancement and cost minimisation (Curtain and Mathews 1990). Management began to appreciate potential benefits of more training for workers and from worker input to workplace design, but their visions of work organisation and industrial relations change were more limited than the union's. Work organisation change during award restructuring was minor, with little indication of work becoming more skilled or more rewarding. Overall, employers wanted to maintain a Taylorist link between pay and productivity, or, more prosaically, minimise labour costs, showing little interest in more broadly skilled workers.

However, employer interest in 'new management strategies' suggested some change in the role of workers, modifying the Taylorist separation of the conception and execution of work. There was some pursuit of consultation as recommended by clauses inserted into the award by the restructuring provisions. In the workplace study, larger timber product companies introduced various new employee involvement techniques, such as share ownership and total quality management, directly appealing to workers and avoiding unions. Such initiatives could modify authoritarian management, increase consultation and lessen the Taylorist separation of the planning and doing of work. Although the workplace research here is not extensive, it is doubtful that these initiatives increased workplace democracy, given the evidence of management resistance to consultative processes with union involvement, and the introduction of forums avoiding unions. Furthermore, even in instances with union involvement, management dominated the agenda and continued to make important

decisions without consulting employees or the union. Some workers and their representatives reported increased workers' self-confidence in interaction with workplace superiors, but rarely was productivity improvement questioned. This was also suggested by shop stewards who believed the union should be more accepting of cost-cutting measures.

Union representatives' willingness to accept variable application of award conditions challenges the view that the award system imposed uniform rigidity on Australian workplaces (Drago *et al.* 1992). The timber industry developments illustrate the shift by Australia's industrial relations system to meet employer demands for greater variability and more enterprise level determination of working arrangements. It is notable that award restructuring stimulated employer co-ordination. Timber industry award restructuring changed the industry award significantly, permitting variation of specified award conditions and showing more flexibility in Australia's industrial relations system than asserted by some critics (Drago *et al.* 1992). Significant co-operative work between the union and employers developed during award restructuring, suggesting qualified support for DIR's 1988 observation that timber industry employers supported award and training reform. However, the employers' limited view of flexibility and opposition to the union's 'skill-enhancing' objective showed management disinterest in the 'post-Fordist' vision inspiring the union approach. From employers there was growing interest in using employee workplace knowledge through various participatory schemes to increase productivity, although such initiatives were often designed to avoid union participation and were combined with cutting costs associated with labour.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Post-Fordism in Australia

Many writers claim that modern industrial economies are in the midst of major change that is altering the workforce demands of employing organisations (Mathews 1989a, Piore and Sabel 1984). More skilled workers and co-operative industrial relations are claimed to be increasingly necessary. Post-Fordist theory has been influential in these debates, though post-Fordist theory is not homogeneous (Amin 1994a). Piore and Sabel (1984) popularised post-Fordist theory in their argument that contemporary industry was at a watershed as changes to work could reinvigorate skilled craft workers who have been overwhelmed this century by the semi-skilled operators of Fordist production organisation. Other post-Fordist theory emphasised that from the mid 1970s economic and social change undermined the stability of the post World War Two period.

In the later 1980s, Australian policy makers were influenced by an 'optimistic' post-Fordist theory postulating that more flexible, specialised and adaptable work processes were replacing rigid Taylorist and Fordist arrangements (Bamber, Boreham and Harley 1992, Campbell 1990). These required more worker skills, training and co-operative industrial relations, especially in workplaces, to facilitate more conceptual input by workers. In short, jobs were becoming less fragmented and more integrated (Mathews 1989a). This 'optimistic' post-Fordism is the central hypothesis tested in this study, firstly, at a more general level, by looking at Australian industrial relations change in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and secondly, with two case studies. Three main elements of optimistic post-Fordism are focussed on: firstly, was work organisation subject to fundamental change that undermines Taylorist and Fordist forms; secondly, were work skills increasing; and, thirdly, were more co-operative and democratic industrial relations developing?

At a general level, several difficulties have been identified with optimistic post-Fordist theory, including that labour markets and processes are more diverse, historically and contemporarily, than its adherents claim (Campbell 1990, Grint 1991, Hampson 1991a, Thompson 1989). Taylorist and Fordist management techniques have been used selectively, being suitable in some areas but not others, and their use has not excluded other strategies (Wright 1995). Optimistic post-Fordism has been criticised for not seriously considering 'insecure' employment, focussing instead on developments where new technologies were introduced in ways that can benefit workers (Campbell and Burgess 1993: 102). Dismissing this growing form of

employment begs various questions, including how much job choice people have during high unemployment, especially those with few market-recognised 'skills'. Furthermore, 'non-standard' employment often entails minimising labour costs, including by avoiding employment regulations, a priority not fitting the optimistic post-Fordist vision of workplace change (Campbell and Burgess 1993: 101-2). Although these points are not central to the empirical research in this thesis, which is of 'typical' employment (full-time jobs), they raise important problems with the optimistic post-Fordist analysis.

A further dilemma with optimistic post-Fordism is ambiguity about the processes shaping contemporary work change and the probability of post-Fordist developments. John Mathews has been criticised for inconsistent positions, sometimes suggesting that an economic-technological imperative impels employers to adopt post-Fordist forms, while at other times stressing that a social and political process, influenced by unions, is critical (Neilson and Harris 1996, Hampson, Ewer and Smith 1994). Three distinct views have been identified in Mathews' work (Hampson *et al.* 1994). A 'strong' position emphasises that changing markets and technology ('techno-economic' developments, Mathews 1994: 86-92) 'require' more democratic workplaces and more skilled workers (Hampson *et al.* 1994: 233). However, Mathews and other Australian post-Fordists also note instances of intensified Fordist production. This 'weaker' view posits a choice, affected by union activism, between management-dominated 'neo-Fordism' and more democratic workplaces. In a third conception, Mathews recognises that post-Fordist forms can be undemocratic, as 'lean production' is in Japan (Mathews 1994, Preface), although he has been criticised for not clearly appreciating the differences between Japanese and European work teams (Hampson *et al.* 1994). These positions seem incompatible. Reference to 'techno-economic' paradigms or "techno-organisational co-evolution" (Mathews 1994: 86-92) implies little choice in work organisation. Arguing that unions and workers can influence work organisation or that new technologies may be used in hierarchical work organisation infers that various work arrangements are feasible. Recognising these differences suggests that various production methods and industrial relations arrangements currently exist, and that it is premature and simplistic to estimate that modern economic and technological changes affect all work in the same way (Thompson 1989). These issues are not pre-determined, as in the 'strong' post-Fordist view. It is important to consider empirical research to evaluate the existence of various contemporary work and industrial relations changes.

Through the 1980s, demands for industrial relations change intensified. Australian politicians responded by altering industrial relations systems in different ways across the State and Federal jurisdictions. At least some elements of these changes rejected the 'optimistic post-Fordist' vision. Similarly, significant employer

groups' demands were based on different aims. However, the Federal ALP Government (of 1983 to 1996), influenced by 'optimistic post-Fordism', supported award restructuring, helping it become central in industrial relations in the late 1980s. Award restructuring was part of the change to more specifically address enterprise demands, although some argue that this did not change industrial relations and work regulation significantly as award relativity was effectively maintained, thereby inhibiting enterprise focus (Plowman 1990a). The fairly wide acceptance by the late 1980s of greater enterprise level-determination of work regulation possibly reflected a greater ability of employers to influence industrial relations policy (Fells 1993). Visions of enterprise level bargaining varied substantially, however, including over how much the AIRC should vet working conditions.

Summarising international economic and industrial relations developments in the 1980s, Badham and Mathews (1989: 228) identified that many countries, including Australia, changed industrial relations systems "to provide for greater flexibility, skills progression and training". They characterised employer approaches in this period with two opposite 'ideal types'. One avoided the strictures of collective bargaining, 'restrictive practices' and legislative protections relating to employment, while the other increased co-operation between unions and employers and used more highly skilled workers. Badham and Mathews (1989: 229) suggested that the latter approach dominated Australian employers from 1986 to 1989 in the early stages of award restructuring. This seems questionable given that much activity under the 1987 two tier National Wage Case Decision focussed on conditions 'trade-offs' (rationalised as measures raising productivity) to offset wage rises. Many unions supported nationally related awards and greater employee training to enhance worker functional flexibility. Many believed this strategy began in the metal industry, with its detailed division of labour and relatively highly unionised, male workforce (Macken 1989). A different employer approach, led by the BCA, supported reducing the AIRC's role and increasing direct 'enterprise bargaining', although many employers appreciated the wage restraint and relatively stable industrial relations of the Accord period.

According to optimistic post-Fordists, award restructuring would assist post-Fordist work change, although not all workplaces were expected to follow this model (Mathews and Curtain 1990). At some moments, the AIRC encouraged 'post-Fordist' style work change, recommending joint consultation in workplaces and career path development. Award restructuring was central to these. The ALP Federal Government believed award restructuring progressed well in its early stages, although it recognised that results varied. Early case studies of award restructuring suggested that it was most widely implemented in manufacturing and government administration but was of little relevance in service industries due to different labour force 'problems' (Curtain, Gough and Rimmer 1992). Some employers showed more interest in labour cost

minimisation than higher skilled workers. Case studies would help identify why particular strategies were followed in certain areas. While aggregating single case studies would not prove or disprove any particular thesis about recent work change in Australia, further empirical study would increase knowledge of award restructuring's implementation and inform, qualify and critique general perspectives, such as the 'optimistic' post-Fordist analysis of work change. This work's empirical research is useful here, particularly as it is located in areas seen as following a productivity enhancement model, informed by a post-Fordist workplace strategy (Curtain and Mathews 1990, Mathews 1992a).

6.2 The Case Studies

6.2.1 The Australian Taxation Office

The case studies of changes to work and industrial relations in a white collar, public sector, office-work setting and a blue collar, manufacturing milieu during award restructuring from the late 1980s into the early 1990s enabled comparison of two different areas of employment. The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) case, with relatively equal numbers of women and men employees, could be used to evaluate the critique of award restructuring that it was relevant for workers in similar circumstances to where it originated, the metals industry, but not for 'feminised' areas (McCreadie 1989). The ATO case also enabled estimation of the applicability of award restructuring in a clerical work setting. Although it might be argued that 'optimistic' post-Fordist theory (as defined in this thesis) applies to private enterprise, taking the theory as addressing market 'driven' work change, it is appropriate to consider public sector employment. Firstly, public sector employees are a significant proportion of the workforce, about 30 per cent. Secondly, government administration changes (tighter budgets, corporatisation and privatisation) have pressured public sector managements to adopt strategies similar to private sector methods, like 'downsizing'. Also, both private and public sector management, in general, maximise workers' output and minimise labour costs (Macdonald 1986). Researching the ATO was also relevant as Mathews (1992a) examined it, arguing that it was undergoing fundamental industrial relations and work organisation transformation towards a post-Fordist style 'learning organisation'. The questions in this case addressed whether changes in the ATO matched claims of better jobs, improved career opportunities and more democratic industrial relations (Curtain 1993).

Industrial relations became more consultative in the ATO during award restructuring, following substantial industrial relations conflict in the early 1980s. This study indicates that award restructuring did not arise only, or necessarily in the first instance, in metal manufacturing. Discussions about restructuring Australian Public

Service (APS) awards covering office-based work began in the early 1980s. It would be a little surprising if work regulation as an issue did not arise in the APS where technological change had significant implications for work. In late 1987 the Second Tier Agreement replaced three separate award streams that had limited keyboard operators' career prospects. In the ATO, award restructuring included job redesign, intended for all ATO employees but with most effect in the ATO's processing centre. Here, a highly segmented division of work was ameliorated and employee participation increased to create more varied jobs with both keyboard and clerical tasks. However, some workers and their representatives questioned whether 'whole' jobs, to which the ATO was committed in its award restructuring agreement, were created, believing that tasks remained separated and performed repetitively. Management exerted pressure to 'downgrade' job tasks although lower classification employees, preponderantly women, gained more access to promotion and a larger percentage wage rise. A fall in resignations and budget constraints limited career openings, but ATO women employees gained more access to workplace consultation, training and career paths than their private sector counterparts, modifying the pre-existing 'Fordist' industrial relations and work organisation, suggesting that in a unionised and relatively technologically advanced workplace award restructuring benefited low level women employees. However, not all low level jobs were eliminated and some data processing went to private Tax Agents, probably with inferior working conditions and less union presence, thereby contributing to labour market segmentation.

Contrasting with larger Federal public sector organisations that tended towards 'multi-skilling' and more consultative industrial relations, the smaller Australian Securities Commission (ASC) pursued a 'low skill' approach to its workforce (Probert and Hack 1991). It appears that a management approach different to other APS organisations was critical. Although the same union covered the ATO and ASC, it is not clear whether the union followed the same approach in each. Further investigation would provide insight into the significance of union strategy in these cases.

It is possible that ATO change was largely shaped by its most senior manager acting as a 'champion of change' (Mathews 1992a: 3; 1994: 235). I have argued, however, that the ATO was affected by several factors, including the Commissioner of Taxation, union and employee support for job redesign and union agreement to explore workplace change but excluding a 'dual' strategy of dividing ATO work between a core of skilled professionals and a mass of low-skilled processors, as occurred in the ASC and tax administrations of other countries (such as the United States). Decisive to changing the ATO was the changed political context. The 1983 elected Federal ALP Government promoted 'participatory management' and 'industrial democracy' in the APS. The revenue raising function of the ATO, combined with 'taxes' as a public issue (in the early 1980s tax avoidance schemes and inefficient tax collection received

wide publicity) probably made the ATO a high priority department to government. The ASC, with limited public contact, contrasted with larger Federal public sector agencies and departments. Probably greater union and government attention would be directed at the larger departments. Comparatively high union density in the public sector and strong union presence (including in the ATO, shown by the major RSI dispute of the mid 1980s) probably contributed to more consultative industrial relations and 'positive' job redesign in large Federal public sector agencies. However, some workers opposed job redesign, believed the unions were too conciliatory, and that ATO work had intensified (experienced as greater stress at work).

6.2.2 The Timber Industry Case

In the late 1980s the Federal Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) saw timber industry employers as among Australia's more enlightened managers, recognising that employee training and work organisation needed changing. Curtain and Mathews noted that the response to award restructuring would be influenced by the "external labour market strategy being practised" by enterprises (1992: 440). They ventured that the timber industry was, in the late 1980s, one of several industries (also metals, vehicles and food processing) likely to adopt a comprehensive approach to award restructuring as their employers and unions had "undertaken overseas study missions and produced widely circulated reports linking award restructuring to the need for extensive changes to increase industry competition" (1992: 441). Praise was given to unions, like the Australian Timber Workers Union (ATWU), that pursued an "industry reformist agenda for achieving a greater export orientation of their industries" (Mathews and Curtain 1992: 441).

This industry sector had some characteristics similar to the metal industry: manufacturing with a majority male workforce, a detailed division of labour with numerous award classifications, and unions seeking improved career prospects and jobs through award change, aiming to increase employee skills with expanded and more formalised training. In the timber industry, the ATWU initiated award restructuring in the later 1980s. It was not a priority for employers. A notable aspect of the employer response was to develop a national employer organisation, the Federation of Timber Industrial Associations (FTIA) covering the major timber producing States, to represent them in award restructuring negotiations.

Through award restructuring the ATWU sought greater workplace consultation, a 'pay-for-skills' rather than 'pay-for-tasks' award structure, and a nationally integrated training system. Like many Australian unions in the later 1980s, the ATWU focussed on increasing workers' functional capabilities to meet the demands for greater work 'flexibility' and higher productivity, implicitly offering a different agenda to the focus of some employers on reducing labour costs by

increasing numerical flexibility, for instance. In this workplace research, shop stewards supported career path and training development but saw little scope for changing jobs. Some also argued that the union should permit greater award variation, including reductions in working conditions.

The research revealed a distinction between the approaches to award restructuring of the employers' organisation, the FTIA, and individual employers. A 1989 tripartite timber industry 'mission' that visited overseas timber plants supported more co-operative and higher skilled ('post-Fordist') workplaces, indicating some employer spokespeople agreed a more skilled workforce would improve the industry, sharing some of the union's vision. However, employer actions from 1989 did not reflect this view. The deep recession made increased employee training more improbable because of cost implications. Overall, timber industry employers did not embrace workplace consultation as recommended by clauses inserted into the award as part of award restructuring. These provisions permitted variation of certain award conditions via a workplace consultation process agreed to by the union. Larger employers adopted formalised consultation more often than smaller workplaces.

Some employers worked with the union on award change, while others avoided the union, preferring company employee participation schemes, including just-in-time and total-quality-management. Such schemes encouraged employee involvement in work design, modifying authoritarian management and Taylorist separation of work planning and execution, although they incorporated worker identification with the enterprise's interests, undermining union allegiance. In the timber industry workplaces, workers' participation schemes did not significantly increase workplace democracy as the 'agenda' was dominated by management-defined productivity.

Greater co-operation between the union and employers was achieved during award restructuring, with some employer interest in award and skill formation changes. However, the employers' view of flexibility (especially its focus on work hours) concentrated on cost minimisation and opposed increasing workers' skills, indicating different aims to the union's 'post-Fordist' goal. Employers were little interested in workers gaining deeper and broader production knowledge, suggesting that they did not seek consensual, high-skill approaches to workplace change as proposed by Curtain and Mathews (1992). Notably, such an approach was somewhat evident in the employers' industry organisation (that arose in response to award restructuring) but much less so in workplaces.

6.3 Conclusion

The research for this thesis focussed on award restructuring's effects on industrial relations, work regulation and work organisation change, and whether

optimistic post-Fordist theory was supported by developments. While the empirical research covered selected areas of employment, they are relevant because post-Fordist strategies were claimed to be evident in these areas. The general theoretical discussion raised significant problems with optimistic post-Fordist analysis, but this does not mean that work and industrial relations were not subject to significant change in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In both case studies, work and industrial relations changed during award restructuring and the respective unions sought work organisation change and a skill-based classification schema. Work organisation change in the ATO, mostly affecting its processing centre where previously separated keyboard and clerical tasks were combined, was more extensive than in the timber industry. Many workers in this ATO area learned new skills, although the new jobs combined similar level tasks, avoiding more fundamental job redesign that would have brought different level tasks together. Career opportunities increased and, to some extent, the Taylorist and Fordist style segmentation of work was modified. Performing simpler tasks remained repetitive and some processing work was effectively transferred to private sector Tax Agents where less favourable working conditions could be expected. Job rotation increased a little in the timber industry workplaces, but overall work organisation change was not an employer priority. Cost minimisation was. The union's objective of increasing employee skills was largely resisted by employers, although some support was expressed by employer spokespeople. In the timber area the demands on workers' skills did not change greatly, while in the ATO, processing workers' skills 'widened' to meet the demands of increased tasks, although they were mostly within a classification level.

Another aspect of the optimistic post-Fordist view, particularly the 'strong' version, was the claim that co-operative industrial relations were increasingly important. In these cases covering the late 1980s to 1993, industrial relations became more consultative. The ATO embraced a structured employee participation that included union involvement and support, although the union and management continued to have disagreements. Workplace consultation increased in the timber industry, although unevenly. Larger timber employers introduced new management strategies that increased employee involvement in organising work, modifying hierarchical workplace relations characteristic of Taylorist and Fordist methods. The predominant objective, however, was to raise management-defined productivity.

The empirical research suggests that women in a major public sector organisation made gains under award restructuring. In the timber sector, award and work changes were less extensive, although the union accepted more award flexibility. Employers tended to oppose increasing workers' skills significantly. These cases suggest varied changes to work and industrial relations, casting doubt on the 'strong'

version of optimistic post-Fordism that technology and market changes impelled the development of more skilled work and more democratic workplaces, but fitting the 'weak' version of optimistic post-Fordism that recognises difference in recent work changes. The cases also indicate modification of Taylorist and Fordist approaches to work organisation, although there was also some work intensification. Further comparison of the union approaches in the ATO with the Australian Securities Commission could help evaluate the notion, supported by this research and central to the 'weak' version of optimistic post-Fordism, that union strategy has an important impact on contemporary workplace change.

Significantly, this award restructuring experience suggests that work regulation and organisation change can be pursued within Australia's award system, although that system did not stimulate these changes. This empirical data suggests that award restructuring permitted work regulation change, although not to the extent desired by many timber employers. The unions in this study accepted significant change within the industrial award framework, to award classification structures and specific award clauses. Workers differed about recent pressures at their workplaces. Some believed unions should accept working conditions reductions while others thought unions should maintain strong independence from management, despite difficult economic times.

The limited work organisation changes in the timber industry did not fulfil Curtain's and Mathews' hopeful early estimation (1990) that it was among Australian industries with some interest in changing industrial relations, work and skill formation practices to a 'post-Fordist' approach based on more highly skilled and autonomous workers in democratic workplace relations. Management was more interested in reducing labour related costs, enterprise specific work skills, encouraging workers' enterprise commitment, and increasing their involvement in production organisation.

The ATO case offers a case contrary to critiques of award restructuring that it was only suitable for male manufacturing workers. In the ATO, women workers gained more career opportunities, a more formalised workplace consultation process than developed in most of the timber industry, and increased workplace training compared to most women employees in lowly unionised and insecure jobs (Butler and Brown 1993). A limitation of this research is that it did not thoroughly investigate the 'gendered' measuring of work skills and award restructuring's effects on this. However, award restructuring did not appear to radically alter the evaluation of work skills in APS office-based work. 'Traditional' female skills remained at the bottom of the award hierarchy.

This workplace material suggests that work and industrial relations in Australia experienced significant, although varied, changes through the late 1980s to 1993. The results suggest that the 'strong' post-Fordist view does not account for the variety of

work change even in these limited cases, including that work intensified and that for many, work organisation change was minimal. However, recent changes to work organisation increasing workers' application to their work, including by contributing to work process design, support the notion that modern employment requires more 'skills' from workers, but often workers do not experience this as beneficial because work intensifies. Mathews' work, however, includes another approach to post-Fordism and contemporary workplace change, one that is not so deterministic that the future of work will be 'post-Fordist'. In this latter approach, contemporary workplace change is not predetermined. Mathews emphasises that the strategies adopted by employers and unions are critical to modern work change. Recognising the specific characteristics of these cases, there is support for the view that higher union density encouraged a broader approach to award restructuring (and workplace change in general) and less emphasis on cost minimisation. More substantial gains for workers, in terms of career opportunities, pay increases and work design change, were possible where union density was higher.

This empirical research supports the view that particular types of employers in Australia have shown interest in job redesign, especially large public sector organisations and subsidiaries of large overseas corporations. Contrary to the implication of the term 'post-Fordism' that recent developments at work signal fundamental changes to its organisation and to industrial relations, it has been argued that employer interest in forms of employee participation has recurred through this century, suggesting that employee management policies of Australian employers have shown a "cyclical rather than evolutionary or developmental" trend (Wright 1995: 214), although recent workplace initiatives, including team-working and just-in-time, modify established approaches. In the cases for this study, work organisation was altered to differing extents. Although existing work practices were modified to differing extents, these changes do not support the notion that recent work changes indicate a fundamental 'post-Fordist' transformation of work.

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