

Australian statistics show collapse in manufacturing, mounting jobs crisis

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Reports released in recent weeks have underscored the destruction of manufacturing jobs, enforced by successive Australian governments and the corporatised trade unions, and a deepening jobs crisis, especially for young people.

Data from the 2016 census, released this week, showed that the number of manufacturing jobs fell by 24 percent over the preceding five years. The sector now accounts for just 6.4 percent of total employment, the lowest level in history, down by 2.6 percentage points since 2011.

This month's annual Jobs Availability Snapshot, conducted by the Anglicare charity, found an average of almost five applicants for every entry-level job across the country.

The reports puncture the claims by the Liberal-National government and the corporate elite, based on understated jobs figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, that employment is rising.

The census indicated there were just 683,688 workers employed in manufacturing in 2016, including in part-time roles, down from 902,826 in 2011. The precipitous decline is the result of an ongoing offensive by the major corporations, Labor and Liberal-National governments at the state and federal level, and the unions, against the working class.

The fall was even starker in working class areas that were once industrial hubs. In the New South Wales Illawarra region, centred on Wollongong, south of Sydney, manufacturing jobs fell by 36 percent from 11,858 in 2011 to just 7,000 last year.

Wollongong was previously a steel manufacturing centre. In 2011, shortly after that year's census, BlueScope Steel announced 1,300 sackings at the city's Port Kembla steelworks.

The cuts, which followed decades of layoffs and

restructuring, were enforced by the Australian Workers Union (AWU). In 2015, the AWU struck a sellout enterprise agreement with the company, mandating a further 500 sackings, the destruction of longstanding working conditions and an unprecedented three-year wage freeze.

The unions have played a similar role in every area. In South Australia, almost 18,000 manufacturing jobs were destroyed over the five-year period. In that state, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) collaborated with General Motors in the destruction of hundreds of jobs at its Holden plant in the northern Adelaide suburb of Elizabeth. This month, the company, the state's Labor government and the union enforced the closure of the plant, directly destroying over 900 jobs.

At least 5,000 manufacturing jobs were slashed in Victoria between 2011 and 2016. There, the AMWU enforced the shutdown of Ford's remaining plants in Broadmeadows, Melbourne and Geelong last year, and the end of production at Toyota's plant in Altona, Melbourne this month. Estimated flow-on job losses from the closure of the entire car assembly industry nationally are as high as 200,000, centred in the car components sector.

Commenting on the census figures, social demographer Mark McCrindle said the "declines in manufacturing employment are unprecedented." He told the media: "You've got an increasing shift from full-time work to part-time or casual work, and that's all creating a weaker employment market."

Workers increasingly confront unemployment, and low-paid, precarious work in the "gig economy," mainly in the services sector.

The number of workers employed part-time over the five-year period grew by 14 percent, as opposed to 4

percent for full-time work. Part-time employment now accounts for a third of all jobs, up from one-tenth 25 years ago.

In South Australia, the number of full-time jobs fell by 10,000, to 435,000, while part-time employment increased by 22,000 to 270,000.

In Sydney, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that part-time work between the inner-west suburbs of Newtown and Homebush increased by 20 percent to more than 35,000, accounting for almost a third of employment in one of the city's most densely populated areas.

Employment in the rental, hiring and real estate services industry grew by almost 15 percent to account for over 182,000 jobs nationwide. This was on the back of the ongoing housing bubble on the east coast, fuelled by property investment speculation and a mountain of debt.

Jobs in healthcare and social services, along with education, rose by over 15 percent, apparently based on a proliferation of private education institutions, employment providers and health-related industries.

Successive governments have spearheaded the privatisation of each sector, providing a boon for corporate operators, while creating a mounting crisis of the public health and education systems.

Figures for individual services sector occupations also showed a dramatic rise. The number of baristas and cafe employees grew by 23 percent over five years. The increase was 27 percent for fitness instructors and 25 percent for beauticians.

The growth of these sectors has contributed to wage growth being at its lowest level in recorded history, at an annual 1.9 percent across the private sector, much less than the real cost of living.

Workers in the services industries are among the lowest paid, and many do not receive weekend and overtime penalty wages, often as a result of wage-slashing agreements signed between major companies and unions.

According to figures released by the Department of Employment this week, annualised wage growth in new union-brokered enterprise agreements over the June quarter was 2.6 percent, the lowest since 1991. Across many industries wages do not keep pace with the rate of inflation, in other words, the unions are enforcing effective wage cuts.

Anglicare's jobs availability report indicated that

young people and unskilled workers are being forced to compete for these poverty-level jobs. In May, some 124,000 entry-level job seekers were eligible for just 26,000 positions.

Since 2006, the proportion of advertised entry-level jobs has fallen by 7 percent. In 2012, there were more than 60,000 entry-level jobs advertised. That number is now well below 50,000.

Anglicare noted that successive governments have punished the unemployed, through the expansion of work for the dole schemes aimed at forcing them into menial, unpaid work to receive their meagre welfare benefits.

The Liberal-National government, deepening attacks initiated by previous Labor governments, has initiated an automated debt repayment system. Thousands of welfare recipients have been falsely accused of being "overpaid" and owing the government money.

Underlying the destruction of manufacturing, the growth of precarious employment and the assault on the unemployed is the dominance over society of a capitalist elite, whose soaring wealth is increasingly derived from parasitic financial speculation. This layer is intent on increasing its fortunes through the destruction of "unprofitable" industries and ever-greater exploitation.



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