

More than half of Australian workers in part-time insecure employment

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The Liberal-National Coalition government claims that its policies have produced an employment upswing, with the creation of half a million additional jobs since it took office in 2013. In reality, it has intensified the pushing of workers into casual, part-time or contract work, a process that begun under the Labor governments of the 1980s and 1990s.

Last month, in response to official figures showing the unemployment rate remained at 5.6 percent in May, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull boasted: “Every lever of policy put in place by the government is pulling in the direction of more economic growth, more jobs and better jobs.”

However, a recent report shows the deepening of the levels of unemployment and under-employment that became entrenched under the last Labor government from 2007 to 2013. Hundreds of thousands workers remain jobless or have been forced into precarious employment with little hope of ever securing better-paying full-time positions.

A report released by the Australia Institute’s Centre for Future Work at the end of last month revealed that, for the first time in recent recorded statistics, less than half of all workers are in a permanent full-time paid job with holiday, sick and other leave entitlements.

Based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and other government data, the research found full-time paid jobs with normal leave entitlements fell to 49.97 percent of all employment in 2017, from 51.35 percent in 2012.

Over the same period, the share of part-time jobs rose two percentage points to 31.7 percent, a new high. The number of workers in casual jobs without paid leave entitlements rose 1.6 percentage points to 25.1 percent.

Underemployment, the proportion of people working but who want more hours, jumped from 7.6 percent to

9.1 percent, while average hours worked each month fell from 141 to 139.

In a media release, report co-author Jim Stanford said: “Given current labour market conditions and lax labour standards, employers are able to hire workers on a ‘just-in-time’ basis. They employ workers only when and where they are most needed, and then toss them aside. This precariousness imposes enormous risks and costs on workers, their families, and the whole economy.”

The impact was greatest on young workers, who “are giving up hope of finding a permanent full-time job, and if these trends continue, many of them never will.”

According to Stanford, since 2012 the standard job “has been whittled away on all sides by part-time work, by casual and temporary jobs, by shifting more tasks to supposedly independent contractors and self-employed gig workers.”

In reality, this process goes back far further, although the report says the deterioration was masked during the “mining boom” of 2002–12.

During the 1980s, the Hawke Labor government struck a series of Accords with the Australian Council of Trade Unions that suppressed strikes, enforcing the deregulation of the economy, elimination of manufacturing jobs and gutting of hard-won conditions. In the 1990s, the Keating government partnered with the trade unions to institute “enterprise bargaining,” which laid the basis for an endless onslaught on jobs, wages and conditions through individual workplace company-union agreements.

The current government’s claims were further dented by an article in the *Guardian* that pointed out that part-time jobs accounted for 47 percent of the one million jobs the government said it had “created” over the past five years.

Moreover, the monthly ABS unemployment figures cover up the real level of joblessness by counting as employed anyone who has worked for just one hour a week. The more reliable Roy Morgan employment survey said unemployment stood at 9.8 percent in May. An estimated 1,316,000 workers had no job while a further 1,251,000, or 9.3 percent, were under-employed, working part-time and looking for more work.

Companies across numbers of sectors have announced jobs cuts in recent months as part of ongoing drives to slash costs and boost profits.

Most recently, mining equipment company **Austin Engineering** announced it will shutter its operation in the New South Wales Hunter Valley town of Muswellbrook at the cost of 100 jobs.

This month also, **ASC Shipbuilding** in South Australia said it will shed 223 jobs by June as the Air Warfare Destroyer (AWD) project winds down.

At the end of May, communications provider **Optus** confirmed it will slash a further 400 jobs to “remove duplication.” A week earlier, the company said it will phase out its subsidiary brand, Virgin Mobile, destroying 200 jobs and closing 36 stores.

Last month, **Vodafone Hutchison Australia** announced plans to restructure its contact call centre in Hobart, Tasmania cutting up to 100 jobs.

Private hospital operator **Healthscope** also announced in May the closure of two hospitals in the state of Victoria at the cost of more than 400 jobs. Service provider **Spotless** will cut 220 after the company last month lost a cleaning contract at Flinders Medical Centre and Modbury Hospital in Victoria.

Australia’s largest cattle producer, **Australian Agricultural Company**, announced plans to mothball its abattoir outside Darwin in the Northern Territory (NT) at the cost of 200 jobs.

In its May budget, the **NT government** announced 200 public service job cuts over the next two years and imposed a freeze on further hiring.

In April, the government-owned **Australian Broadcasting Corporation** announced it will cut 20 jobs in its capital city newsrooms. Last year, the corporation axed approximately 200 positions.

During February, **National Bank of Australia** (NAB) announced it will slash 1,000 jobs as part of its

plan to cut a total of 6,000 jobs over the next three years.

In late January, oil and gas producer and energy retailer **Origin Energy** announced it will eliminate 650 jobs in its Queensland operations, mostly at its Brisbane office.

None of the trade unions involved have initiated a fight against the job cuts. Instead, they have stifled opposition by their members, in line with the union’s decades-long partnership with employers, in the name of making Australian business “globally competitive.”



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