

# Working Women's Centre

258 Flinders Lane,

Melbourne 3000

Telephone 654.1228

Discussion Paper No. 41  
ISSN 0314-6006

November 1979

## HIDDEN UNEMPLOYMENT

Despite the Federal Government's emphasis on the importance of reducing the rate of inflation, for most Australians the matter of greatest concern is having a job. An opinion poll (1) conducted by The Age in December 1977 showed that unemployment was rated as by far the most important issue, 29 per cent of those interviewed placing it at the top of the list. Only 16 per cent rated inflation as the most important issue.

Few people would share the equanimity of the Minister of Employment and Youth Affairs, Mr. Ian Viner, who recently expressed satisfaction at the "improvement" in the unemployment situation - namely a reduction of 10,300 in the number of unemployed people in Australia in October compared to the figure for September. These figures are not seasonally adjusted and, since the decrease in the unemployment between September and October 1978 was 17,000, the situation is nothing to crow about. It is true that the total number of unemployed revealed by the ABS preliminary survey (2) was 54,800 less than at the same time last year. However this still acknowledges that there were 312,700 Australians looking for work in October and unable to find it. The number of those who actually want work is probably far higher than the ABS figures indicate due to a number of factors. These factors camouflage the real level of unemployment.

### DEFINITION OF UNEMPLOYED

The definition of unemployed persons given by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in its Labour Force Bulletin is:

Unemployed persons are those aged 15 years and over who were not employed during the survey week, and

- (a) had actively looked for full-time or part-time work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the survey week and:
  - (i) were available for work in the survey week or would have been available except for temporary illness (ie. lasting for less than four weeks to the end of the survey week), or
  - (ii) were waiting to start a new job within four weeks from the end of the survey week and would have started in the survey week if the job had been available then; or
  - (iii) were waiting to be called back to a full-time or part-time job from which they had been stood down without pay for less than four weeks up to the end of the survey week (including the whole of the survey week) for reasons other than bad weather or plant breakdown. (3)

The stipulation in clause (a) of the above definition (unemployed persons refer only to those who have actively looked for work during the four weeks to the end of the survey week) eliminates several groups of persons:

1. Young people engaged in various government-sponsored training programmes,
2. Those who have stayed on at school longer than they otherwise would have because they feared they would not find employment,
3. Discouraged workers,
4. Those who are willing but not able to look for work,
5. Potential workers.

## 1. Youth Programme Participants

The Government subsidizes a number of training programmes for unemployed youth. The main schemes are:

Special Youth Employment Training Program (SYETP)

Education Program for Unemployed Youth (EPUY)

Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS)

Work experience

As involvement in these programmes prevents the participants from actively seeking work, most are not included in the unemployment statistics.

SYETP is a four-month on-the-job training scheme whereby employers receive a \$45-per-week government subsidy for each young trainee. Four months is quite inadequate to train anyone for any skilled job and unfortunately many employers see SYETP as a means of getting cheap labour for unskilled work and sack their so-called trainees as soon as the four-month period is up, then put on a new trainee for whom they also claim the \$45-per-week training allowance. Since each young person is only entitled to one training period, those who are sacked are then thrown back on the dole with insufficient skills to get a job and no hope of any further training.

EPUY aims to provide basic literacy and numeracy skills to enable educationally disadvantaged young people to compete for jobs. Since jobs which require minimal skills are rapidly being automated out of existence this programme is doomed to fail in its expressed purpose. It can be argued that the participants benefit personally from learning these basic skills but they may well become more alienated and discontented when, having had their expectations raised, they are unable to translate those skills into jobs.

Work Experience programmes are usually of very short duration - about three or four weeks - and are mostly aimed at students still at school who are paid a nominal wage of \$3 per week in return for experience which is supposed to make it easier for them to get work later. This scheme is also seen by many employers as a means of getting cheap labour. It has been reported to us that one large company saves up certain jobs which would normally be done by regular staff for the school holidays and is thereby able to cut down on paid staff, thus actually raising the level of unemployment.

CYSS is not designed to train anyone for a job. In fact if those who run the programmes attempt to orient them towards training for employment the programmes become ineligible for government funding. They are merely a means of keeping the young unemployed off the streets and out of mischief. This is not to denigrate the real service provided by many dedicated people who work hard to make life easier for the unemployed. However the fact remains that the programmes do not create jobs for the participants. The ABS acknowledges these people as unemployed and includes them in the official figures.

## 2. Still at School

Table 19 of the ABS Labour Force bulletin September 1979 includes among the unemployed 20,400 persons still at school who had been unemployed for periods of less than thirteen weeks, 5,700 who had been unemployed for between 13 and 25 weeks and 8,000 who had been unemployed for 26 weeks or longer. The first group probably consists of students who sought work during school holidays. The table does not show how many students sought permanent work and returned to school because they could not find it and there is no way of knowing how many are able and willing to work but have stayed on at school because they were unable to find employment or did not even try because they did not expect to be able to find it.

According to a recent report published by the Schools Commission<sup>(4)</sup> there has been a trend during the seventies for students to stay longer at school. This is partly due to increasing expectations of higher qualifications on the part of employers and the report argues that the high youth unemployment has not accelerated the trend. However unemployment has been rising steadily since 1974 and it is likely that this has affected the school retention rate - at least for those students whose parents can afford to keep them at school. It seems very likely that the 13,700 students who had been unemployed for more than 13 weeks were seeking fulltime work and were only still at school because they had been unable to find it. They could hardly be actively seeking work and doing justice to their studies at the same time.

### 3. Discouraged Workers

The ABS unemployment figures disregard discouraged workers who may have been seeking work for months and who, after applying for numerous jobs without success, have given up looking - either temporarily or permanently. They would be willing to work if someone offered them a job but they no longer feel it is worthwhile spending time and money on fares, petrol or telephone calls to chase after jobs which are filled before they make contact with the advertiser. This applies particularly to those who have no qualifications - mainly the very young and women who have been out of the workforce for a number of years caring for their children. It also applies to people who live in rural areas where only a limited variety of jobs is available, very few fitting the categories seen as suitable for women. The cost of transport to seek jobs is even more prohibitive in country areas than in the city and here also women are more disadvantaged than men - particularly married women who can only apply for jobs close to where their husbands work. For instance, there is little point in a woman applying for a job in Melbourne if her husband has a job in Robinvale. Even if her husband does not have a job it is unlikely that they would be able to leave their home in Robinvale and live in Melbourne on the wage the woman could expect to earn. The woman knows there are no jobs available in Robinvale so she does not actively look for one. Yet it is apparent that many such women do want work because they eagerly seek seasonal work such as fruit-picking when it is available.

Another ABS publication<sup>(5)</sup> gives some indication of the number of discouraged workers and shows clearly that the great majority in this category are women.

Table I: PERSONS AGED 15 TO 64 NOT IN THE LABOUR FORCE WHO WOULD LIKE A JOB BUT NOT ACTIVELY LOOKING FOR WORK - SEPTEMBER 1979

<u>Reason for not actively seeking work</u>	<u>Males</u>	<u>Females</u>
Discouraged: (unspecified)	3,800	
Considered too young or too old by employers	*	15,700
Language or racial difficulties, lacked necessary schooling, training, skills or experience	*	8,200
No jobs in locality or line of work	4,800	41,500
	8,600	65,400
No jobs in suitable hours	*	9,500
Other	6,900	29,800
	15,500	104,700

Source: ABS Cat.No. 6219.0 September 1979.

#### 4. Willing but not Able

In addition to discouraged workers there is a large group of people who would like work but who, for reasons which the ABS classify as Family Considerations, are unable to seek it. This category applies almost exclusively to women (see Table II). It includes 8200 women whose spouses disapproved of their taking a job. The difference of some 21,000 between men and women who gave the reason of ill health etc. as a reason for not seeking work is probably accounted for by pregnancy.

Table II: PERSONS AGED 15 TO 64 NOT IN THE LABOUR FORCE WHO WOULD LIKE A JOB BUT NOT ACTIVELY LOOKING FOR WORK - SEPTEMBER 1979

Reason for not actively seeking work	Males	Females
Family considerations: (unspecified)	*	8,200
Ill health of other than self	*	13,100
Unable to find child care	*	32,100
Preferred to look after children	*	124,700
Other family considerations	*	36,300
	*	214,400
Own ill health, disability, pregnancy	<u>33,600</u>	<u>54,800</u>
	33,600	269,200

Source: ABS Cat.No. 6219.0 September 1979

#### 5. Potential Workers

It is impossible to assess the number of people who may fall into this category. They are married women who fear social disapproval if they seek jobs when school-leavers are unemployed or if they venture outside the role of fulltime homemaker. Many will not admit that they would like to work outside their homes even if they have no young children to care for. However in wartime many women who had previously considered it unacceptable to seek employment suddenly went to work fulltime in factories and offices and felt they were rendering the nation a service, as indeed they were. The growing crescendo of attacks - by government leaders and others - on married women who seek work rather than large families are designed to keep women out of the labour force and thus minimize the real rate of unemployment.

#### ESTIMATE OF HIDDEN UNEMPLOYED

Leaving aside hypothetical calculations as to how many young people stay on at school and how many married women might like to work if societal attitudes were different, we can still calculate that there are approximately 49,100 men 373,900 women who want paid work and cannot get it in addition to the official total unemployment figure of 312,700. In addition, in September 1979 there were 38,700 men and 82,000 women who were working part-time and would have preferred to work fulltime. These people were in reality partly unemployed. When we take all these factors into consideration the unemployment picture is far grimmer than that painted by the figures published in the press.

#### THE EFFECTS OF COMPETITION FOR JOBS

An unfortunate spin-off from this state of affairs is the cut-throat competition for jobs. Competition is generally regarded as a good thing which develops team spirit, encourages people to exert themselves and keeps prices down. Competition for jobs keeps wages down but, although it may incite people to perform more and better work, it certainly does not develop team spirit. Rather, it encourages a ruthlessness which disregards the needs of others and engenders an attitude of each for her or himself and the devil take the hindmost. Such an attitude is devastating for the union movement but it is often overlooked because various mechanisms are used to camouflage it.

The most common of these mechanisms is the habit of denying some people the right to a job. There are those who would suggest that older people should retire to make room for the young. Others contend that Australian-born people should be given preference over migrants. A more subtle mechanism is the argument of those who have jobs but fear losing them: I really deserve my job because I am a better person than those dole-bludgers who don't really want to work anyway. But the chief scapegoats are married women.

Every Tom, Dick and Harry seems to think that he has a right to decide what is good or proper for all married women. "They should be at home minding their children", say these pious pundits who would be up in arms if anyone dared to dictate to them how they should run their affairs. Even men whose wives are employed sometimes maintain that other men's wives should not be in the workforce, justifying their own situation (if they admit it) by saying: "I'm not against married women working - my wife does a few hours at the library (shop/office etc.) but she has a woman to look after the children and she doesn't neglect her home".

It is because of such implied or overt criticism that so many married women remain among the hidden unemployed although many find one wage insufficient to provide adequately for a family and keep their children at school long enough to equip themselves to have a chance of getting a job in their turn. The official rules deny such women the right to be considered part of the labour force.

#### DANGER FOR THE UNION MOVEMENT

The danger in this situation for the union movement is that is that these women, who are victimized by society, also need a scapegoat. Many of them are only too ready to concur with the oft-repeated assertion that unions have too much power and are pricing people out of jobs by constant demands for higher wages. An opinion poll conducted by The Age<sup>(6)</sup> in July 1977 found that more women (50%) than men (41%) were in favour of tough policies to prevent unions from taking strike action. Another poll<sup>(7)</sup> found that housewives were far less likely than women in the workforce or men to identify with the working class. Strangely enough, many of them do not seem to feel that wage increases gained for their husbands are of benefit to them. Perhaps their husbands do not pass on the increases. It is more likely that they feel a hidden resentment against those who are paid for their work while they themselves are dependent on the grace and favour of another person for anything they want to buy.

Because they are isolated out in the suburbs while their husbands are away all day, housewives are more susceptible than women in the workforce to the view of unions presented by the media. Although they may have had a job before they married, it is more than likely that they did not belong to a union or, if they did, they probably took no active part in the union's affairs. In the past unions have not encouraged active involvement by women on union committees and executives, believing - as did the women themselves - that they would only be in the workforce for a short time before marrying and having children. Many men do not bother to discuss work-related matters with their wives so it is not surprising that these women find unions somewhat irrelevant to their daily lives. About the only time they ever hear of unions is when they learn from the daily press or the television that some public service will be cut because a union is on strike. They know nothing of the frustrations and negotiations which have preceded the ultimate action and they are not interested because only the end result affects them. It is only when they return to the workforce that they begin to realize what the unions are on about but even then, seeing they are usually expected to do the domestic chores as well as their job, it is difficult for them to become involved in the union unless unions go out of their way to encourage them and to concern themselves about matters which are of importance to women.

WHAT UNIONS CAN DO

1. Keep a check on the number of trainees taken on by particular firms and how many of them are fired after four months and replaced by other trainees. Pressure the Department of Employment and Youth Affairs to obtain a report from each trainee on his/her experience and to keep records of the number of trainees allotted to each employer and the effect of such training on the young person's work prospects.
2. Monitor work experience programmes and take action on any cases where the employment of students results in a loss of work for their own members.
3. Vigorously pursue ACTU policy outlined in the Working Women's Charter: ie the right of all people to work irrespective of sex, marital status etc. State this policy publicly every time the media returns to the attack on married women.
4. Invite communication from unemployed school-leavers and older women who would like to join the workforce and make organizational facilities available to such people in order to maintain contact with them and make them union-minded. So long as they are unorganized they are a threat to the union movement as they are likely to work for lower than award wages in order to secure a job and thus erode the conditions won by unions over the years.

REFERENCES

1. The Age. Melbourne. 9/12/77.
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics. The Labour Force Australia October 1979. Cat. No. 6203.0. AGPS. Canberra. November 1979.
3. Ibid.
4. The Australian Schools Commission and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian Students and their Schools. AGPS. Canberra. 1979.
5. ABS. Persons not in the Labour Force (Preliminary) March 1979. AGPS. Canberra. May 1979.
6. The Age. Melbourne 28/7/77.
7. The Age. Melbourne 26/12/77.