‘THE CHANGING AND UNEQUAL TIMES OF WORK’

‘WHAT’S AT STAKE: CHALLENGES FOR INCOME SECURITY, TIME, EQUALITY AND HEALTH’

COMMUNITY FORUM PLENARY
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Barbara Pocock
Time and inequality

Working life has always seen a struggle over time - a core element of the ‘wage-effort’ bargain

- Hours per day, week, year
- ‘Social’ or ‘unsocial’ hours
- Paid leave - sick, vacation, caring
- How hard we work - intensity
- Security of working time
- Say over working time – flexibility
- Working time over the life-course (chances for learning, retirement, care)
- How much time a household sells to work
Working time issues very hot in Australia

Five aspects attracting attention
1. Work until you are 70
ONLY A BLOKE WHO'S WORKED IN AN OFFICE HIS WHOLE LIFE WOULD THINK YOU CAN WORK UNTIL YOU'RE 70!
2. Work harder
3. Work for less per hour

- Cut pay top ups (‘penalty rates’) for working at unsocial times
  - On Saturdays, Sundays, nights
  - All time is the same now in a 24/7 economy

- Cut minimum wage – by 15%
  - In environment of low collective bargaining, low unionisation, fatal for those with weak bargaining power, women, immigrants, hourly paid workers
4. Work longer hours, work for nothing

- Almost 14% of Australian employees work very long hours
- Higher than the OECD average proportion of 9%
- 21% of men working very long hours compared with 6% for women.
- Many hours are unpaid, especially amongst the growth industries like services and in professional and managerial occupations.
5. On the positive side: More and better paid time for new mothers?
Why is ‘time’ a hot political issue?

- Compared with 36 countries Australia performs well on most OECD measures of a ‘good life’ - But in the bottom 20% of these 36 countries on ‘work-life balance’.
- Feminisation of labour force:
  - One in two workers are women now
- Women feel the clash of work and care
  - Inflexible jobs
- Shorter and more insecure, poorer paid hours for working carers/women,
- Long hours for over a third of full-time men
  - ‘his hours turn me into a single mother’
- Lengthening commutes
- More work at unsocial times
  - Shifts, Saturdays, Sundays
Natural time, Clock time

Not all time is the same
Time is a key vector of inequality
45 years
Changes in the proportion of people participating in the labour market, 1966 to 2011
Aug-66

- Men
- Women
- Total
Changes in the proportion of people participating in the labour market, 1966 to 2011
Aug-11
73% of full-time women working 45 hours or more say they are often or almost always rushed and pressed for time (51% men)

56% of part-time women say the same (34% men)

73% of mothers of preschoolers say the same (57% men)

68% of parents of children 5-17 years (59% men)

Worse for workers who care for aged, disabled
Effects of changing working time regimes
Exacerbated by weakening boundaries around time and place of work

And for some, compounded by love of the job and strong work identities
What to do?

1. Create better leave standards for working carers
   1. Holidays
   2. Carers leave
   3. Improve paid parental leave

2. Create meaningful effective rights to flexibility around working time

3. Ensure effective care regimes (affordable, quality, accessible)

4. Limit long hours and compensate for unsocial working time

5. Maintain the minimum wage
Implications for research

- Analyse inequality in terms of both
  - income/wealth and
  - time (its quality, intensity and allocation by class and gender)

- Analyse the implications of the commodification of women’s time for
  - care regimes,
  - the labour process and the terms of care work,
  - immigration,
  - the distribution of unpaid domestic work and care
  - and the regulation of commodified domestic work.