

Unions of the future: Challenges and opportunities

presented at **Australian Services Union National Conference**

17-19 November 2014

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Aims of presentation

- Considers the changing nature of work and employment and asks:
- What are the implications for the future of trade unions?

How is work changing?

- **Work**
- **Labour**
- **Jobs**
- **Employment**
- **Occupation**

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- Why is it important for unions to distinguish between work, jobs, labour, employment and occupation?
 - How does it help the mandate of unions to build membership, promote 'decent work' and the adoption of labour standards?
 - Why do workers need to understand the differences?

Work

- activity undertaken to achieve an output such as a thing or a service
- what we create, what we produce, what we do
- involves mental and physical inputs
- ‘great works’ ‘it works’ ‘working well’ ‘the works’ ‘housework’ ‘working in the garden, on my poem, my yacht’ etc (creative and recreational aspect)

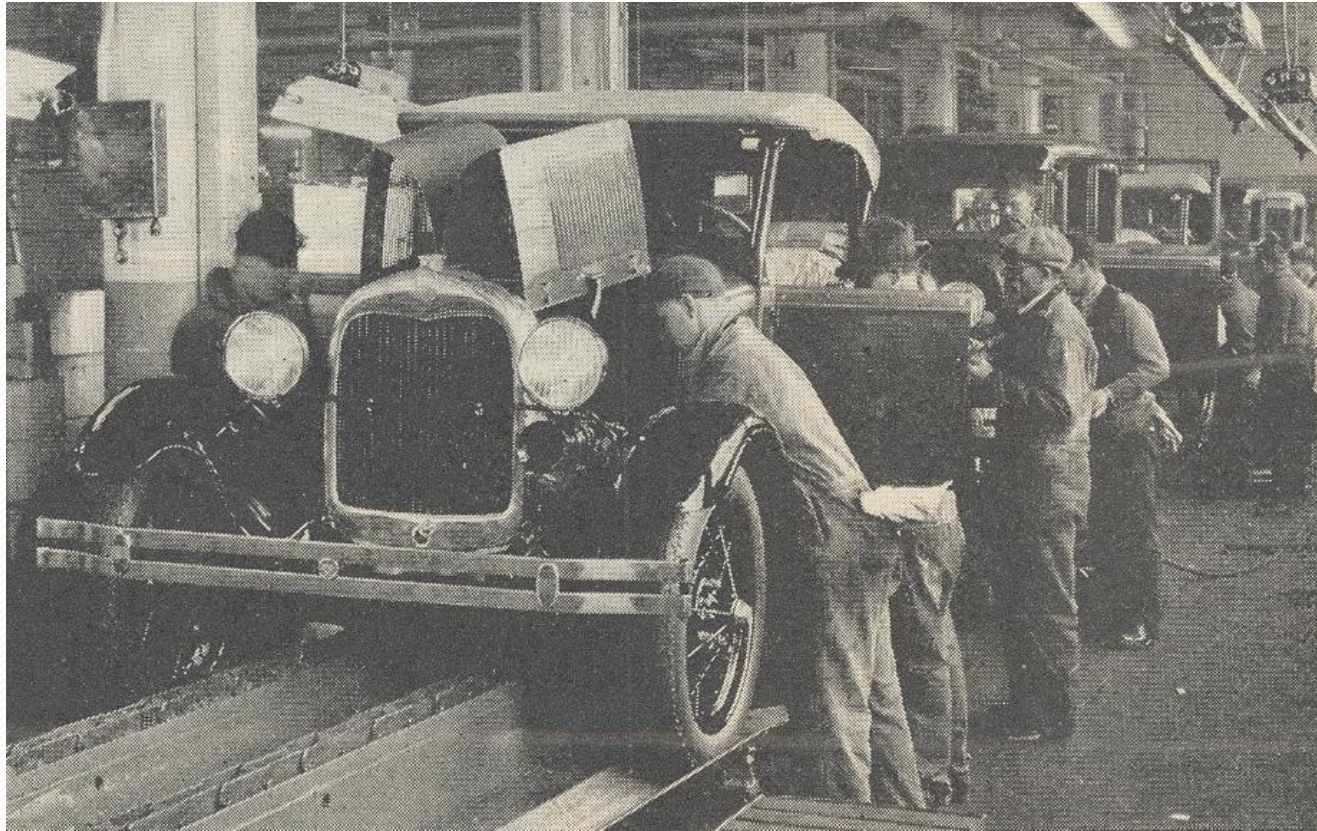
What is changing?

Work – what aspects of work are/can change?

- What work is truly new or different in the 21st century economy?
- Most 21st century work is an iteration of existing types of work and fits into categories – eg selling/buying, human services, designing, engineering, writing.....

Labour

- collectivist ideas about work – labour movement, organised labour, Labor Party, International Labour Organisation
- Connotes a distinction from ‘capital’ ‘owners’ ‘bosses’ ‘gentry’
- Industrial era terminology – production lines
- Labour - toil, distress, onerous activity, pain, effort







Labour – are collectivist ideas about work redundant?

➤ is labour as ‘hard work’ at the end of the line with automation?

Perhaps this is the most challenging for unions

Collectivity as a concept around work- especially industrial work - has eroded

Undermined also by casualisation and contractualisation

Jobs

- a formula of tasks/work bound by a time frame (eg Mon-Fri) and allocated to a person
- the most common term of reference for the allocation of work – ‘my job’ ‘job application’
- socially and economically constructed idea (hunter-gatherers had work but not jobs!!)

Etymology:

1550s, in phrase *jobbe of worke* "piece of work" (contrasted with continuous labor), of uncertain origin, perhaps a variant of *gobbe* "mass, lump" (c.1400; see [gob](#))

Jobs – as a set of defined tasks?

- In what ways are these being transformed and reorganised?
- How are traditional jobs being fragmented?

Jobs can be unpacked into tasks....

As per specialisation of online employment agencies....link workers to specific tasks

Employment and unemployment

- Links to ideas of social relationships, social integration
 - employed by someone to do work packaged as a job
- a transaction between a worker and an employer:
‘paid’ employment, being an employee
- *work is **not** necessarily employment*
- *unemployment* is a social/economic/statistical idea

Employment /unemployment

- how is employment as a social relationship transformed?
- what are the new forms of employment relationship?
- Casualisation and contracting out – around 30% of all jobs

Occupation

- Related to skill, craft , status, profession and career
- Teacher, accountant, plumber, software engineer....
- Manager, principal, CEO, officer.....
- Confers a strong sense of personal identity
- Also relates to ideas of autonomy and self direction in relation to work, mastery of a skill and occupational advancement

Occupation – new skill sets? new forms of status?

- How are traditional occupations changing?
- What are the challenges for occupations ...?
- Do occupations guarantee social mobility and advancement in the same way they did in the past?

Industry – per cent of workforce 1984-2014

	Nov. 84	Aug. 14
Manufacturing	17 ⁰ %	8%
Retail	10.4 ⁰ %	10.6 ⁰ %
Education	7 ⁰ %	8%
Health care and social assistance	8.2 ⁰ %	12%
Construction	7 ⁰ %	9%
Professional, scientific	4 ⁰ %	8%
Information, media, telecom	2.4 ⁰ %	1.7 ⁰ %

ABS - 6291.0.55.003 - Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, Aug 2014

Occupations: per cent of workforce 91-14

	August 91	August 14
Professionals	17 ⁰ %	22.6%
Managers	12.3 ⁰ %	13.4%
Technicians and trades	17 ⁰ %	15 ⁰ %
Community and personal service workers	6.4%	10%
Clerical and admin	13.3 ⁰ %	14%
Sales	9.3 ⁰ %	9.6%
Labourers	13 ⁰ %	9.5 ⁰ %

ABS: 6291.0.55.003 - Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, Aug 2014


- Slow, incremental change by industry and occupation
- Growth in health care and social assistance/ education and training industries
- Growth in occupations inc.
 - Community and personal service workers
 - Accommodation and food services
 - Professionals (covers 318 specific occupations)
- Marginal growth in new types of jobs eg in information technology


Challenges for unions

Well-understood:

- The demise of industrial era labour force including bureaucracies
- The demise of standard employment relationship – standard working week
- Growth of casual and contract workforces

- **Less well-understood - *beyond casualisation***
 - Jobs fragmented into tasks as facilitated by online employment agencies
 - <https://theconversation.com/online-labour-marketplaces-job-insecurity-gone-viral-20020>
- Technology facilitating new forms of work organisation such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) in higher education

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- **Contract work in new forms –**
 - Growth of sub-contracting along supply chains
 - Growth of franchising arrangements
 - Zero hour contracts and unpaid internships

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- **Loss of ‘middle class’ jobs – what does this mean?**
 - The effect of reduced public expenditure and aggressive corporate sector cost cutting
 - Corporatisation across many sectors disallowing self-employment
 - Highly focussed on efficiency and profit taking
 - Elements of professional jobs can be offshored

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- **Where to for unions in the 21st century?**

Needed:

- Innovative strategies for engagement of workers outside a standard employment relationship

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- Unions that have a broader mandate for worker protection – including social security and social rights
eg Australian Unemployment Union

<http://unemploymentunion.com.au/>

- Especially important for younger people due to exposure to diminished employment protections and social rights

- New forms of organisation for workers outside a standard employment relationship eg
 - Freelancers Union: <https://www.freelancersunion.org/>
- Recognition and engagement of workers outside a physical 'workplace'
- Restoration of occupational guilds and fraternities (one of Guy Standing's main recommendations)

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