



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Main Committee

ADJOURNMENT

Employment

SPEECH

Thursday, 26 November 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date	Thursday, 26 November 2009	Source	House
Page	119	Proof	Yes
Questioner		Responder	
Speaker	Thomson, Kelvin, MP	Question No.	

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (11.53 am)—I welcome and support the call today by trade unions for a national inquiry into the disturbing trend towards the casualisation of the workforce in Australia. Australia has avoided the worst impacts on employment from the global financial crisis, which we have witnessed in the United States, the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The Rudd government deserves strong praise for its decisive action, which has protected many jobs. However, it has been revealed by a study conducted by researchers at the University of Sydney that the conventional wisdom that workers have kept their jobs in the downturn but with shorter hours is not quite right. What the survey of 6,500 workers revealed was that eight per cent had lost their jobs in the past year, with less than half finding work again and indeed that one-third had dropped out of the workforce altogether. Those who did get re-employed could only get casual jobs, with the study showing that 34 per cent of people who changed jobs in 2008-09 moved into positions with no paid leave compared with 30 per cent for 2007-08.

Mark Lennon, from Unions NSW, correctly points out that this is a disturbing increase in the number of working Australians who lack job security and paid leave. As Andrew Stewart has identified in his book on employment law:

What seems more troubling is the growth in the number of Australians who are doing casual jobs simply because those are the only jobs on offer. The evidence suggests that, for many in this situation, casual work is not some sort of 'bridge' into permanent employment. It is more of a trap in which there is little training, little prospect of career advancement—and fewer entitlements. Their jobs are legally insecure, even if sometimes quite stable in reality.

Casual jobs have grown faster than all other forms of employment in the last 15 years, meaning more employees are in precarious and less stable workplace situations. As the Sydney university study outlined, only 22 per cent of employees reported that a collective agreement determined their pay and conditions and noted that the role of awards was more relevant to their situation. As the report noted, casual employees are much less likely than permanent employees to feel they have the opportunity to negotiate their pay and are much more likely to report reliance on awards for the determination of their pay and conditions.

Jeff Lawrence from the ACTU has called for a public inquiry into workers' income security and job protection in 2010, indicating it should be wide ranging and include such areas as greater rights for casual workers and limits on offshoring and the unnecessary loss of Australian jobs overseas. I believe such an inquiry should also include consideration of the skilled migration program and its role in crowding out the opportunities for our domestic labour supply. In 1995-96 skilled migration was 24,100 and it rose to over 114,000 by 2008-09, four to five times what it used to be. I believe it should be cut back to 25,000.

It is worth noting that workforce participation by older Australians is rising, not falling, and could rise further. For 2008-09 average participation in the workforce was 81 per cent for 50- to 54-year-olds, 69 per cent for 55- to 59-year-olds and 49 per cent for 60- to 64-year-olds. Skilled migration undermines the ability of this group to find full-time employment. As reported today on *AM*, Larry Valesini, a 53-year-old building worker from Penrith who was retrenched after 14 years with Multiplex, has found himself competing for casual work, despite wanting full-time work.

We as a nation need to look at our own domestic labour supply before we seek a solution from abroad that undermines the opportunities for those who are willing within our own ranks to fill that requirement. I believe the skyrocketing of skilled migration and the skyrocketing of the subclass 457 visa program have diminished opportunities for local workers and taken the focus away from the skills, the training and the apprenticeships, which our universities and TAFEs should be providing. There should be an inquiry and it should consider the impact of the rapid rise in skilled migration and the temporary work subclass 457 visas.