

RESEARCH SEMINAR

TOPIC: **The *Work Choices* Effect: Evidence from Workplace Agreements**

SPEAKER: Associate Professor Peter Gahan
Work and Employment Rights Research Centre
Department of Management, Monash University

DATE: Friday 26 September 2008

TIME: 12 noon – 1.30 pm

VENUE: 3rd floor Boardroom,
Newcastle Graduate School of Business, University House,
Cnr. King and Auckland Street, Newcastle

The Speaker

Peter Gahan is Associate Professor of Human Resource Management in the Department of Management at Monash University. He was Director, Workplace Innovation in the Victorian Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development. Peter has published widely in HRM and employment relations, including organisational creativity, high performance work systems, cross cultural work values, managing EEO in public sector organisations, union strategy, labour market regulation, and Australian labour law.

Abstract

Even in the context of a longer run process of transition away from the traditional model of regulation based on awards and arbitration, the *Work Choices* reforms presented a wholesale challenge to the collectivist foundations of Australian industrial relations. In the shadow of a commitment to overturn many of the harsher and more controversial elements of the policy, it remains to be seen whether *Work Choices* will have a more pervasive impact on industrial relations processes and outcomes. By altering the form and content of workplace agreements, it is arguable that *Work Choices* is likely to have a wider flow-on effect to other workplaces, and a broader effect that will be evident for years to come. This paper reports on investigation of this *Work Choices* effect.

Using data drawn from the content of a large sample of workplace agreements made since the introduction of *Work Choices*, the analysis reported here suggests that *Work Choices* has been associated with a dramatic shift in bargaining arrangements and outcomes, some of which are likely to prove difficult to reverse. Four results in particular are reported. First, *Work Choices* is associated with a dramatic surge in non-union agreement making, both individual and collective in nature. More significantly has been the effect on minimum employment standards. Second, *Work Choices* has afforded employers with the opportunity to cut labour related costs by removing entitlements not protected by statute. Third, agreement making has also been used by many employers to introduce new flexibilities which impose costs and obligations on employees. Fourth, the data nonetheless reveal significant difference between agreement made before and after the introduction of the Fairness Test in May 2007.

ALL WELCOME

A light lunch will be provided

Please RSVP and any enquiries to Dr John Lewer
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