

The tragedy of part-time work

[Henry Ergas Blog](#) | 30 March 2012 | [9 Comments](#)

The ACTU is concerned about the ‘dramatic and troubling’ increase in the numbers working part-time. And rightly so. For it makes our lives disorderly, wastes valuable energy and impedes millions of young people from fully experiencing the school of life.

Consider, for example, Northborne Avenue, which runs through Canberra’s bustling town centre. There are, as I speak, cars cruising along the right lane and similar numbers cruising along the left. Why is that? It is those part-timers: some are heading home, having finished their day’s work; others are driving to work. It would be far better were those jobs full-time. Only half the number would be on the roads; and they could all go to work in the morning, in a nice orderly line along one side of the Avenue, progressing at a measured, albeit somewhat minimal, pace, and then return, in the same, predictable way home at night.

Nor should the savings be understated. With all workers full-time, clocking in at 8-43 AM and clocking off at 4-52 PM, there would be no need to keep those pesky buses on the roads at other times. As for the traffic police, they could take a well-deserved break, having presided over the queues at the morning and evening peak.

Obviously, with only full time work allowed, shops would not be open all hours. And that would bring a further efficiency gain. No more of this wanton shopping. Rather, the weekly groceries expedition would be confined to Saturday morning from 9 to 11, while all cinemas, restaurants, cafes and takeaways would only serve until 12 noon. More family time for everyone! How could it go wrong?

And let’s have none of that nonsense about working Mums leaving work early to pick up their kids from school or daycare. Make those little suckers wait until 5pm – that’ll train them to the benefits of doing things full time.

Last but not least, it would remiss of me not to mention the gain in life experience. When I was student, part-time work was as rare as hen’s teeth. Good thing too, for we learnt what it means to starve. Not now. Today’s pampered youth can earn their dosh on the side, sip lattes every day and take holidays overseas. Little wonder they have no sympathy for those at the bottom of the pile. And little wonder they don’t join unions.

Yes, part time work is a tragedy. Better half of them were unemployed. And thank goodness the ACTU is doing its bit to make it happen.