Discipline and Punishment under Welfare to Work

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Master narratives: The dignity of work?

- ‘These are the human faces of the patchwork economy. The faces of Australians who can work. I believe the test of our approach is what we see in those Australian faces, what we say to those Australian people. The old way saw a victim, the old way offered an excuse. Some today see a problem, they offer blame. I see a person, a person who can work. I offer only opportunity, I ask only responsibility in return. Give a chance, take a chance. It’s the only way it can work.’ (Gillard 2011)
Working Nation & Job Compact

- 1994 – Keating government
- Those unemployed for 12 months must engage in job searching and prove they have done so
- Guaranteed a 6-12 month job placement
- Applies to Newstart recipients
- Part of broader skill formation and economic adjustment agenda. Encouragement of training & direct wage subsidies for employers. Job creation for very long term unemployed to gain work skills and engage in employment
Job Network

- Argue Working Nation is expensive, poorly targeted and ineffective – create Job Network
- First privatised employment services system. Service delivery tendered to for-profits & non-profits.
  - Job Matching for short term unemployed
  - Job Search Training for unemployed three to six months
    - two weeks of intensive job search training then assisted job search
  - Intensive Assistance for highly disadvantaged & unemployed 12 months +
- Creation of Work for the Dole, Personal Support Program (PSP), and Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET)
Job Network rhetoric

- Emphasis on short term assistance - strong economy and labour market deregulation will take care of the rest
- ‘hassle and help’ (Abbott 1998)
- ‘what this Government is trying to do is change a culture of welfare to a culture of work. We’re trying to replace an ethic of entitlement with an ethic of responsibility’ (Abbott 1999)
Welfare Reform – Howard style

- Welfare to work reforms introduced in 2005
- Definition of ‘unemployed’ shifts to include single parents whose youngest child is over 6 years old. Moved from PPS to NSA (principal carer) when youngest turns 8.
- Push to reassess DSP recipients to NSA (partial capacity to work)
Job Services Australia

- Labor takes office 2007
- Review of Job Network – failing to address the needs of the long term unemployed, unable to address skills shortages, inflexible and characterised by excessive red tape.
- Creates Job Services Australia – some adjustments:
  - Greater emphasis on accredited training, improving outcomes for more highly disadvantaged job seekers, incentives for JSA providers to secure job placements through direct contact with employers.
  - But - despite these changes, the fundamental architecture of the Job Network remains (Fowkes 2011).
Welfare Reform II – Gillard style

- Watch this space??
- Breaking news:

  “Teen mums face welfare crackdown”

  “Prime Minister Julia Gillard orders teen mums back to work with Budget crackdown”

  “”Tough love” Budget targets teen mums”
‘Dispostifs’ of welfare to work

- Through the dispositifs of incitement to employability, techniques for the administration and management of human resources are introduced that transform socially recognized rights into dispositifs for, on the one hand, the administration of mobility of the labour market, and, on the other hand, for the control and modulation of the conduct of those receiving benefits... induced to be available for any kind of work, under any conditions... In reality, disciplinary and security options always co-exist... Workfare is an example of a politics of individualization that utilizes both disciplinary and security mechanisms... through the monitoring of cases in their individuality. (Lazzarato 2009)
N. Harou-Romain. Plan for a penitentiary, 1840. From Discipline and Punish Foucault 1975
‘The system’
Reporting

- Hannah: …But one thing that I have noticed is that when I was working and I was fulfilling the 15 hours a week, I could report on-line. And that made a huge difference … when they changed my activity agreement to say that I was studying full-time, there was a box that was ticked that said I was completely fulfilling all of my Centrelink obligations, so I assumed … I would be able to report on line, and I tried many times and it would never work… I got the same answer every time, ‘no you can only report on-line if you are working more than fifteen hours a week’. So because I’m cynical, I think that’s a subtle way of making you feel like a dole bludger, you have to go in, you have to queue up, and most times I’m in there for more than an hour, just to put my form in …
Reporting

- Helen: ‘You’re kind of forced to, not only to work these extra jobs, but to lie. I know other mum’s who’ve done this too, we’ve taken time off and just said that we’ve kept working… rather than get more pension, we’ll take a cut in pay… and not have to be hassled with ‘why did you drop your hours and whatever’, do you know what I mean?… It’s just easier, and so if I’m sick one day and I didn’t need to go to the doctor, or if my shift [as a disability support worker] is cancelled, I’ll just say that I worked it… So yeah, I’d rather just get less money from them than to go through and have to deal with their phone system, or to go in. Because you know, it’s a huge wait and everything, once you do go in.’
Tick a box

- Helen: It’s more when you go into Centrelink and you have something that doesn’t fit into their criteria. You have something extra or something different that’s not encompassed by the system. You go in and you try and negotiate with them about something and there’s no negotiation, and the first person at the desk often says in a very loud voice so that everyone can hear ‘no, no, no you can’t do that, you can’t get paid for that’.
The queue

- Is it necessary to make us stand in the queue when there are no chairs around, so when my blood pressure is low I have to leave the queue to find a chair? … And I often have to wait half an hour in that queue to be told ‘we can’t fix that here at this desk’ … it’s so humiliating and demeaning, demoralizing … I think they’d be better off if they had like a number system, like you’d grab a number and you could go and sit down, and they could call you up.
- Eve: do you think there’s a reason they don’t do that?
- Helen: yeah. I think that it’s designed to make you feel like you are at their beck and call. To let you know they are calling the shots and you just need to keep in line, if you hope to get paid. I think it’s a deliberate psychological ploy.
Employment services
Job searching

- Tricia: Well [the employment agency] come and get you and say, these people need workers, go out there for an interview, they forget the little bit about Sundays, so you go out there for an interview and it's Sundays only - every week. I said well, week days would be good, but Sundays makes it difficult. So it's wasting their time, it's wasting my time… I've said, 'I'm available from 8am in the morning until 5 o'clock any weekday. I would work the occasional weekend … So I think I'm being rather fair and flexible in my hours … They expect you to be on call and available 24/7. Centrelink aren't as harsh… it's your job network that are pushing you out there that you have to be more flexible, you have to do a night time, you have to do a weekend…
Erin: I’m sitting there and I just thought ‘oh, I feel sick’ and I was watching and I thought [gasps] ‘it’s just like going to Job Search Training’… Some people stood up and it showed how they got put down. And I thought that was what I tried to do and I just got shoved right down. Then the other ones who were sitting back and observing, thinking I’ll just be quiet and I’ll sneak in under the radar – [but then] ‘oh, I can’t do that’ – and I thought ‘oh my god, I did that too’. and then by the end was thinking ‘ok, this is what I’ve got to do to obey the rules’. And you can work out who in the room’s decided to accept. …You know, they say you’ll be training – it more or less says that you’ll get help and assistance or whatever and I just looked at [the brochure] and thought, I got no help, I got no assistance, I didn’t get treated with dignity or respect. I know it says that, but the reality is just totally different.
Training or compliance?

- Lena: ‘it’s not about the training, it's really about compliance and making sure they rock up and making sure they do their work and at the end of the day it's really about them complying’

- Lena: ‘Most of my work’s really admin, even though I’m ‘a trainer’, I’m not really a trainer, it’s just crossing all the T’s and dotting all the I’s and making sure, you know, job seekers comply, and if they don’t, I’ve got to report them and they get their payments cut and all that sort of stuff’
The contract

- Erin: I don’t read it you know, and they just turn around and go, ‘here’s your copy’ you know -whatever, just sign it. They give it to me and I just shove it in the file… It feels like you’re signing your life away on a legal document, but you just go ‘whatever’. But I copied these, it is the service guarantee that was off the [Centrelink] website … this was the service guarantee, so this was the service that I was supposed to receive and I just looked at it and just thought ‘what a crock of shit’. [reading] They’ll ‘advise me on job search techniques, career options, vocational employment programs and other services’. [Erin laughs]… Oh, really? [continuing to read] ‘Give me feedback on a job interview if they’d arranged it, help me to meet my..’ – I mean this all sounds like it’s helpful and they’re on my side, and yet the practicality of it is that it’s more punitive, that you know, well ‘do it’, or ‘if you haven’t done that? Punishment’. So this doesn’t just match up.
Katrina: It’s not about reaching targets. Targets are not a part of it. Or… you’d have ‘go getters’ working with the stream one’s and they would reach their targets, but they would have to reach targets that met – say 75% of what the client really, really wanted. They would have to write down what their needs are, and they would have to be fulfilled… And then you would have your stream 3’s and 4’s -they would be more of the social worker type people who would deal with no targets. None whatsoever.
Choice?

• … I mean everywhere you look, there’s an employment agency, like [name of private provider] and - Centrelink will tell you to go to any one of these. They’ll just spin a bottle and pick out Serena Russo, or Wise or Max or whoever and tell you to go there… But Centrelink have got no idea what each place has or does – you know collectively they’re all under the same umbrella, but they’re different… I was just fortunate that I had made inquiries as to where Nerida had got to – otherwise I don’t know what would have happened.
Katrina: I followed Nerida wherever she went, and so I still go and see her every two weeks, just to keep my feet on the ground… they paid for the medical reception course that I just did. And I’m doing a course next week. You know, just so they can see that I’m not just sitting down and doing nothing… Nerida had to get this job because [non-profit agency] closed down here… do you understand streams they have? Stream one is a normal person who can go and get a job, and stream four is me. Ok? … That’s how Centrelink, the government, operate with all of their things, right? Unfortunately all of these employment places – it’s become how many you – if you reach your target or double your target… They’ve given Nerida all of the stream fours –the other staff beside her are all doing stream ones, and they have no idea about people, and they hand out any job. They don’t care… But, Nerida - well she had me when I had my breakdown. She took me out of the office in her own car to the doctors, and then she took me to the hospital and was there with me in emergency. Last week I was there to see her, she had a guy who had tried to commit suicide the night before, and only went in there to see her, and the staff kept knocking on the door saying, ‘you’ve got five more clients out there to see’, and this guy’s about to top himself, and Nerida is his lifeline. And that’s a stream four client. But these employment agencies and Centrelink don’t give a shit… You know, it’s just a spaghetti factory, but with people.
• Tricia: Back then, you went on the pension, and you didn’t have any involvement, they came out once a year to see how things were going … There was no advice or guidance as far as schooling or training. Because I do sort of look back and think, yes, there was many years there wasted – that I could have been doing something back then when I was younger. I came back to Geelong and I had four kids under 7 – one 6 months old. I worked weekends, Saturday and Sunday 9 til 5 both days and I did that for three years and my mum had the kids. And after that I worked week days 9 til 1. So I did work… But looking back on it, if I had of realized I could have gone to TAFE and did a course or something to make it better, because I’ve only worked in food and takeaway. I’m not qualified or trained in anything.
Everyday resistance and tactical compliance
Don’t take it personally

‘I don’t take it so personally now, I kind of think they’re not out to get you, it’s … more just like any bureaucracy- they have their little boxes they need to tick… it’s like any job really, you just kind of have to front up and do things, or whatever… you are just having to jump these little hoops all the time…I have just come to realise that it’s got nothing to do with me – it’s all got to do with them – like I said, ticking their boxes. They’ve got their rules and as long as you can sort of prove that you fit in with certain criteria. Yeah, it’s really annoying, it’s frustrating that you have to do all that, but like I said, it’s not personal.
La perruque (the wig)

- Kim: Now the theory is that I go in there and look for jobs and they actually float around and support me – well that didn’t happen. I know more about what I’m doing than they do, so they just come and float out again and you get leave early, it’s all pretty pointless and so I just do the same thing there that I do at home. Send out emails – I actually looked for houses while I was there, and so every time she moved in I would ‘minimise’ and then ‘maximise’ [the screen]. And I thought yeah, well I’m spending hours at home sending off emails, updating my resume, looking on [teaching websites], reading teaching stuff – all the things I’ve been doing have been about enhancing my employment prospects, short term and long term … so you just do what you have, you just jump through the hoops.
Demanding recognition

- Erin: I ended up working out my own way of speaking to the trainers and I tried to really... I manipulated the system, and I tried to get her on my level... by being friendly, not being threatening, siding with her... I just went up to her, like going up to a school teacher and going ‘Alright, this is what I’ve written’ and she goes ‘Ok, can you put that in the file’ and I said, ‘Well, can you read it?’ and she goes ‘What?’ and I said, ‘Well, I’d really like someone to read it, because I really don’t know I’m on the right track or not’ and she read it and says ‘Did you just right that off the top of your head’ and I said ‘Yeah, that’s what I do for work’. So I just got her to see me as a person. I thought, you might just have written on your form ‘unemployed’, but that doesn’t really match up with who I am or what I’m doing,
Negotiation (children’s needs)

- Kim: Over the Christmas holidays when I obviously wasn’t working they then contacted me and said ‘you need to do this, this and this’. And I said to them, ‘listen you guys, I’m basically unemployable over the holidays’ – I didn’t say it to them, but this is my mentality: I am not going to work in the holidays. I will do whatever I can to avoid working in the holidays because I want to be with my children…My children go to their fathers over Christmas, so I will work, but I said to them, ‘here’s what I’m offering you, this is an Auswim course, a teaching swimming and water safety course. It will cost me $375, if you guys pay for it, I will do it. And they paid for it.
Defiance (children’s needs)

- Tracy: They said you have to have a case manager. And with that, I think that’s wrong. Not the part of getting a case manager, but that the case manager can call you in at any time for an interview. And I said to them, ‘Well, who’s going to get my son from school if I’m at an interview with you? If you can book in between times that I feel I’m going to be able to get back, then I’m not worried about it. I got a breach over that.
Political action

- Hannah: …back then I thought ‘Oh, we’ve got to stand up for ourselves as single mums and let them know, and it’s not just all about money and it’s all about good parenting and delivering sound, upright citizens to the community at the end of it all!’ And now I think [drops volume] ‘Oh, I shouldn’t have done that, I shouldn’t have made a fuss, because I’m just a millstone around the neck of society …what have I done by making myself public like this…I should be willing to go out and do my bit to work as much as I need to be financially independent. How could I possibly think that it was right to be standing up for being, um, for our rights, no not rights, for our expectations as single mothers that we would be able to bring up our children as we want.'
Ethical policy?

- ‘encourage and facilitate public discussion and conversation of the kind that weaves the fabric of what Hegel called an ethical life, a public culture wherein each human subject is invited to be a person who is able to recognize others as persons too’ (Yeatman 2009)
- ‘policy and practice should proceed not from the premise that ‘work’ is an enforceable individual obligation, but that it must necessarily have some socially constituted value and meaning if it is to be a means to social inclusion’ (Dean 2007: p. 586).
Individual recognition?

- But…
- ‘subjects of contemporary states are individuals by fate: the factors that constitute their individuality – confinement to individual resources and individual responsibility for the results of life choices – are not themselves matters of choice. We are all today “individuals de jure”. This does not mean, though, that we are all “individuals de facto.” More often than not, control over life is the way in which the story of life is told, rather than the way in which life is lived” (Bauman 2002: p. 69)