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LABOUR MARKET OUTCOMES AMONG RETRENCHED WORKERS IN AUSTRALIA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

In any one year perhaps five per cent of the workforce experiences retrenchment in Australia. Retrenchment causes people shock and loss of income; they become socially isolated and their psychological health deteriorates. A large number of studies has examined the subsequent labour force experience of retrenched workers, depending on conditions in the labour market, retrenchment practices, hiring practices, state policies and the personal characteristics of the workers. This paper reviews the evidence about the factors that influence the prospects of retrenched workers, identifies some flaws in the design of studies in which that evidence has been collected, and points to ways in which more comprehensive evidence can be collected. An informed interpretation of evidence requires appropriate methods for identifying cause and effect, should rest on a clear identification of the forms of employment that exist, and needs to be sensitive to the manner in which personal characteristics are used by employer as hiring markers.

Many Australian workers have been retrenched over the last decade. There is ongoing retrenchment: workers are hired and fired frequently as part of the normal operations of the industries. Even in relatively good years, retrenchment is part of the experience of nearly one in every twenty workers: in the year to February 1989, for example in a workforce of some 8 million persons, nearly 350 000 were retrenched (ABS cat 6209.0). There have also been retrenchments caused by the recent recession and the downturn in employment that it caused. And there have been retrenchments driven by the industrial restructuring that was initiated by changes in the trade environment. So in 1991 and 1992, some 550 000 persons were retrenched annually. As Campbell and Webber (1996) observe, workers continue to be retrenched even during relatively buoyant economic conditions, so retrenchment is likely to continue as an issue for policy in the foreseeable future.

Many of those who have been retrenched find another job relatively quickly. In the February of both 1987 and 1989 about half of those who had been retrenched some

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time in the previous year were recorded by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as employed, about a quarter remained unemployed, and the remaining quarter were said to have left the labour force (ABS cat 6209.0). Women were less likely than men to be either employed or unemployed. In the year to February 1992, a much smaller proportion of both men and women who had been retrenched were employed.

What happens to the individuals who have been retrenched? These are the persons who have borne the brunt of decisions made by individual firms or by national and state governments. What are their subsequent labour market experiences? And what factors seem to control their individual destinies? Data of the form provided by the ABS certainly indicate some elements of the aggregate story (see Campbell and Webber 1996), but they do not provide much information about the personal characteristics of those who find another job as compared to those who continue to be unemployed or those who leave the labour market, nor do they give much information about the manner in which the decisions of employers and governments influence people's labour market experiences. The purposes of this paper are to review the evidence about the factors that seem to influence the prospects of retrenched workers, to identify some flaws in the design of studies in which that evidence has been collected, and to point to ways in which more comprehensive evidence can be collected. The paper relies primarily upon evidence from Australia, supplemented by overseas experience where necessary.

The paper first reviews briefly the personal impacts that retrenchment has on people. These impacts are large. They affect not only the individual him or herself but also the household of which the individual is a member and the local social circumstances.

The paper then moves on to review a standard interpretation of the factors that affect the performance of retrenched workers in the labour market. The second section examines employment and the third section the quality of jobs. The standard interpretation emphasises the manner in which workers' personal characteristics affect the likelihood of their getting another job and the quality of that job. Relatively little attention is paid to social context, including in particular the employer recruitment practices that make certain personal characteristics relevant in job searches.

A particular set of assumptions about the operation of labour markets is embodied in both the measurements and the inferences from this evidence. The fourth section provides some evidence that these assumptions are not entirely accurate. These criticisms argue for the importance of a closer investigation of the social and labour market context of retrenchment. They also lead us to think that labour market outcomes need to be conceived as histories - sequences of periods of unemployment, training, withdrawal from the labour market, and paid employment - rather than as a single status identified at a single point in time.

The final section of the paper draws together the conclusions about the manner in which labour markets appear to operate. In the end, the paper argues for the centrality of managerial choice in determining the labour market outcomes of retrenched workers. The section sketches a theory of labour markets in which the factors for success or failure identified in studies of retrenched workers are seen to be reflections of the criteria of choice of firms' managers, within the context of state policies, household structures and social expectations about behaviour.

IMPACT OF RETRENCHMENT

In any economic system, changes in the division of labour necessarily involve alterations in the set of tasks performed by any one individual. If individuals occupy more or less fixed positions within the division of labour and their labour power is bought by corporations, changes in the division of labour are likely to involve new allocations of labour power to corporations. Some of these new allocations are achieved by (i) the retirement of older workers in one occupation and their replacement by younger workers in other occupations and (ii) worker-initiated shifts in occupation and employer. Nevertheless, as the ABS labour force surveys indicate, many of the changes are handled by retrenchment - the forced exit of workers from a corporation either when a plant closes down or when its labour force is reduced. As the restructuring of economies has gathered pace in western Europe, north America and Australia since the early 1970s so the numbers of workers who are retrenched has increased sharply.

Nevertheless structural change and retrenchment are not logically linked. Buchanan and Campbell (1992) have shown how the American model of restructuring throws the burden of change onto workers by retrenching one (obsolete) set and hiring another set. By contrast in Europe the state has supported retrenched workers and depressed regions and in Japan the private corporations have absorbed more of the cost of change by engaging in greater retraining and redeployment. Retrenchment is not the only possible outcome of changed employment needs within a firm. Even if, in our economic system, changes in the division of labour require that people shift jobs, it by no means follows that many workers should be retrenched and bear personal hardship. If the benefits of change are gained by all, so the costs should be paid by all. Unless workers see that the costs are distributed fairly they may be less willing to participate in planned change (Wooden and Sloan 1987b).

The immediate personal costs of retrenchment can be large. In most studies these costs are attributed to unemployment, but Burchell (1994) attributes the social and psychological costs to insecurity (of which unemployment is an extreme form) rather than to unemployment per se. The costs include:

1. Shock of job loss. The disbelief, anger, hurt and sense of powerlessness induced by notice of retrenchment are evident in many reports (Fotiadis 1988; Wooden and Sloan 1987b). For most unemployed people in Britain, being out of work is close to the worst experience they had yet endured (Daniel 1990). Loss

of confidence and self esteem have also been reported (Fotiadis 1988; SJCC 1992).

2. Loss of income and the need to rationalise expenditure (Fotiadis 1989). In Britain the single most important aspect of being out of work was lack of money (Daniel 1990).
3. Changes in household relations. Changes in power relations, including loss of respect may be important (Fotiadis 1988; 1989). There is evidence in Britain of changes in the allocation of tasks between household members (Gallie et al 1994) and of a marked increase in the rate of marriage failures among unemployed people (Lampard 1994).
4. The structure of daily life. Much psychological research has observed that work provides not only income but also a structure of time commitments around which daily life is organised. Unemployment removes that structure, and the unemployed comment about boredom (Daniel 1990; Gershuny 1994), pessimism and distress (Feather 1985). Unemployed men and women have lower levels of psychological health than the general population (Gallie and Vogler 1994a).
5. Social interaction. In Britain, the unemployed (especially if single, male) were less likely than the employed to engage in leisure activities with other people outside their household (Gallie et al 1994; Gershuny 1994).
6. Need to search for a new job. It may well also be that a new job offers lower income and other rewards than the job from which the worker was retrenched (Curtain 1987; for British evidence see Daniel 1990). Unemployed workers appear not to hold a reservation wage, preferring almost any job to being out of work (Daniel 1990; Gallie and Vogler 1994b).

These costs are sufficiently large that comparative static evaluations of economic policy should assess also the costs of transitions between two policies.

The negative effects themselves depend not only on the labour market experiences of people who have been retrenched but also on the context and the manner of the retrenchment. Shock and depression can be ameliorated by a sensitive handling of the process of retrenchment: by giving several months' notice, by providing relatively generous severance pay, by providing counselling, and by offering paid time off to search for a job. It seems that in Australia few firms follow such sensitive strategies (SJCC 1992; but for one case, see Campbell and Rimmer 1994). Buchanan and Campbell (1992) describe a broader range of approaches followed by firms and states to adjust labour needs in the light of changing economic circumstances.

RETRENCHMENT AND LABOUR MARKET EXPERIENCES

The labour market experiences of retrenched workers have been studied extensively. Several case studies of retrenchment in Australia have been produced since the early 1980s, concerned with the labour market outcomes for workers retrenched from individual manufacturing plants. Many of these are case studies of plant closure (in most cases one plant from a multi-establishment enterprise). Ireland (1983) examines the experiences of workers retrenched when the GMH plant in

Pagewood, NSW, closed in 1980. A Bureau of Industry Economics report (BIE 1983) traces the experiences of workers retrenched when a meatworks in Tenterfield, NSW, closed in 1981. Deery et al (1986) outline the experiences of workers retrenched when a Tooth's brewery in the Melbourne suburb of Broadmeadows closed down in 1982. Curtain (1987; see also Curtain and Hopkins 1986; Curtain 1985) studies the experiences of workers retrenched when an Email whitegoods factory in the Sydney suburb of Bankstown closed down in 1982. Gordon and Gordon (1987) examine the experiences of employees retrenched when the BHP steelworks in Newcastle reduced its workforce over the period 1981-1983. Wooden and Sloan (1987a) review the experiences of workers retrenched when a Rowntree-Hoadley plant in Adelaide closed down in 1985. Kriegler and Sloan (1986) trace the experiences of workers retrenched when a Bradmill clothing (jeans) plant in Geelong was closed in 1985. Carless (1986) looks at the experiences of a group of workers retrenched when an APPM paper mill in Ballarat, Victoria, closed in 1986. Brown et al (1989) review the experiences of three groups of workers who accepted voluntary retrenchments when the Williamstown Dockyard in Melbourne reduced its workforce in August 1986, December 1987 and February 1988. O'Neill and Dunn (1992) document the histories of workers retrenched when Carrington Slipways, a Newcastle shipyard, closed in 1991. Grindrod (1994) examines the experiences of a group of workers retrenched when three plants (car assembly, meatworks and whitegoods) in the Brisbane/Ipswich area closed down during the mid 1980s.

In addition there have been interviews and focus groups with retrenched workers, including Greek retrenched workers in Melbourne (Fotiadis 1988), Greek women retrenched from the textile, clothing and footwear (TCF) industries in Melbourne (Fotiadis 1989), Italian women retrenched from TCF plants in the Melbourne suburbs of Coburg and Brunswick (Calzoni and Primerano 1992), retrenched workers throughout Victoria (SJCC 1992), retrenched workers in suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney (Buchanan et al 1992: 163-175, see also the case studies of plants 81-161), and retrenched non-English-speaking background (NESB) workers in the Western region of Melbourne (Pearce et al 1995).

The Australian studies have been reviewed by Taylor (1986) and then, more comprehensively, by Wooden (1987; 1988). Taylor deplores the theoretical and conceptual weaknesses of the earlier studies and appeals for both better theory and better data analysis. He (1986) points out that the bulk of the studies have been concerned with male manual workers and argues that more attention needs to be paid to female and non-manual employees. Some of these deficiencies have been remedied in subsequent studies - there is now greater commitment to more sophisticated techniques of data analysis, including multivariate regression, and female employees have received more attention. However, no studies have ventured outside manufacturing industry and the level of theorising can still be judged low.

Wooden reviews the case study evidence, in Australia and overseas, about the subsequent labour market experience of retrenched workers (1988). He points out

that "most studies [of labour market experience] reveal that a substantial number of workers are re-employed relatively quickly, but another sizeable portion are still unemployed many months after the redundancy" (1988: 5). Beyond this he observes that differences between the studies can be great. The length of the period of unemployment after retrenchment seems to vary hugely. This is true within a locality: some workers laid off from a plant are re-employed quickly; others remain unemployed for months or even years. It is also true between localities. As Wooden (1988) points out, the average length of the period of unemployment in a locality seems to depend on:

- State of the local labour market (which may also influence the characteristics of the workers who have been retrenched - see Curtain and Hopkins 1986). The capacity of unemployed workers - especially unskilled women - to gain access to jobs in the growing service industries has been questioned (Curtain 1987). The cross-national comparisons of the OECD (1990) provide evidence of the significance of local labour market conditions for the prospects of retrenched workers.
- Number of retrenchments relative to the size of the local labour market.
- Length of time since the workers were retrenched (see Curtain 1985 for a measure of this effect).

There is also evidence that the effectiveness of the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) in assisting unemployed workers differs between localities (Webber et al 1995).

These characteristics of localities assume great importance to retrenched workers since few displaced workers search for jobs outside their local labour market (Deery et al 1986). Yet most research about the experiences of retrenched workers depends on a sample of people laid off from a particular plant at a particular time. The entire sample is drawn from the same locality and was retrenched at the same time. Presumably this strategy provides a convenient means of deriving a population to study. However, the strategy precludes researchers analysing the effects of different labour market conditions (in different places or different times). Only later can writers (such as Wooden 1988) draw contrasts between localities and between times by comparing the results of different studies. Such inferences presume that the methods employed by the different studies are comparable.

Personal characteristics also affect the length of the period of unemployment. Whereas the study of context has been largely informal, the study of personal characteristics has been highly formal and careful. The most relevant personal characteristics are:

- 1 Age. Older workers are disadvantaged in the search for a new job; perhaps very young workers are too (Deery et al 1986; Wooden and Sloan 1987a, 1987b). There is thought to be strong evidence in favour of this hypothesis (Wooden 1988; see too OECD 1990). There is some British evidence that this finding is specific to recent times (Gershuny and Vogler 1994).

2 Sex. Women spend a longer period than men out of paid employment (Curtain 1985), though not all of the difference may be due to unemployment (Wooden and Sloan 1987a; OECD 1990). There is evidence that women, especially if they have an employed spouse, are less likely than men to find a new job (Curtain 1987).

3 Family status. According to Wooden (1988), US evidence seems to suggest that single men spend most time unemployed after being retrenched. The presence of dependents reduces the duration of unemployment. British evidence indicates that financial hardship bears little relation to future labour market outcomes (Gallie and Vogler 1994a).

4 Education and skill. More education (Wooden and Sloan 1987a) and greater skills (Curtain 1985) reduce the length of unemployment. There is thought to be strong evidence in favour of this hypothesis (Wooden 1988; OECD 1990). (For comparable British evidence see Gershuny and Vogler 1994.)

5 Job tenure. There is evidence that employees who had worked for their employer for a long time find it hard to get a new job (Deery et al 1986) and possibly so do those who had been in their job a very short time (Wooden and Sloan 1987a, 1987b).

6 Job search. Workers who had started to seek a job before being retrenched seem to suffer less unemployment than workers who waited until retrenchment before searching (Deery et al 1986; but see Wooden and Sloan 1987a). There is thought to be good evidence in favour of this hypothesis (Wooden 1988).

7 Methods of job search. These methods are informal (friends and relatives; approaching firms) or formal (newspaper advertisements; CES) - though there is some disagreement over this classification, perhaps reflecting the fact that it is not clear what it is about methods of job search that works better (Carson 1989). There is some evidence that informal methods work best (Callender 1987a; Deery et al 1986), but the evidence may be place and gender specific (compare Daniel 1972; Granovetter 1974; Morris 1984; Lee 1985).

8 Unemployment benefits. The existence of unemployment benefits raises the length of unemployment, at least in theory (Lewis 1994; McGaurr 1994) - possibly by raising the minimum conditions that people have to accept. British evidence is that this hypothesis holds for specific groups of people - for example those with an unemployed spouse (whose income net of unemployment benefits is effectively taxed at a very high marginal rate). For most of the unemployed in Britain, the hypothesis appears to be untrue (Gallie and Vogler 1994a).

9 Ethnicity. Migrants, particularly those of non-English-speaking background, themselves seem to recognise that their age, lack of skills and lack of English language capacity are significant barriers to re-employment (Fotiadis 1988). Davies and Esseveld (1989) show how immigrants came to be discriminated against in

Sweden, and the OECD (1990) reports the risks associated with ethnicity in the USA.

10 Participation in government-sponsored training and wage subsidy labour market programs. There is plenty of evidence that unemployed people who participate in such programs are more likely to obtain a job or to engage in other (non-subsidised training) than are other unemployed people (for Australia see Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993; DEET 1989; DEET 1994; for the US experience see Couch 1992; more general evidence is provided by OECD 1990).

A further characteristic of unemployment has been central in recent discussions of long term unemployment (see for example Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993). This is the observation that persons who have been unemployed the longest have the least likelihood of getting a job. Evidence of this effect is presented in Norris (1993) and Lewis (1994). This fact may reflect the circumstance that longer term unemployment actually reduces one's chance of getting a job: people may lose commitment or social skills; or firms may use period of unemployment as an indicator of worker desirability. Alternatively, the fact may indicate that the long term unemployed are simply those left behind after employers have hired those they deem to be more desirable workers.

Many of the studies of labour market outcomes for retrenched workers in Australia follow a conventional path. They take a sample of workers who have been retrenched, generally as a consequence of a plant closure. The sample is interviewed at one point, or perhaps two points, in time after the retrenchment. The interview inquires *inter alia* into labour force status, eg whether 'employed', 'unemployed' or 'not in the labour force', at the time of the interview(s). In the analysis of the results, 'employed' status is taken as a measure of success for the individual worker. Labour force status at the time of interview is in turn related - perhaps using multivariate regression - to standard variables constructed from the personal characteristics of the retrenched workers (age, sex, skills, qualifications, etc.) or features of their behaviour (timing and methods of job search). In this way the studies seek to identify the factors responsible for success and failure in labour market outcomes.

Such studies have been carefully structured. However, apart from the facts that the general pool of unemployed workers has a different composition from those who have been retrenched and that those retrenched in plant closures differ from retrenched workers in general (Daniel 1990), two problems of conceptualisation run through the studies and threaten to undermine their results.

The first problem concerns the conceptualisation of labour market outcomes. The definition of labour market outcomes is usually narrow and static, understood as just the labour market status of the individual at the time of the interview(s). If we are to measure accurately the consequences of retrenchment we need a broader and more dynamic conceptualisation. This must treat labour market outcomes in terms of labour

market experience in the entire period since retrenchment. It must allow for the possibility of a succession of labour market statuses. Otherwise there is risk of misunderstanding. For example, 'employed' status at time of interview may be an index of a history of largely continuous employment in an alternative, secure, 'permanent' job or it may be a mere staging post in a history of intermittent employment in insecure, casual or temporary jobs. The same point applies to 'unemployed' status. Again this may be an index of a history of largely continuous unemployment or it may be a mere staging post in a history - parallel to some of those with 'employed' status - of intermittent employment. As these examples indicate, attention to status at time of interview misses the significance of histories of intermittent employment.

The second problem concerns the conceptualisation of the variables used in the analysis. The standard variables are constructed from personal characteristics and personal behaviour (features that can be elicited from individuals in a sample survey). These are all supply side characteristics; they are to do with individuals searching for jobs. However, the process of exchange in the labour market is a *two-sided process*, in which not only do workers select jobs but employers select workers. If we are properly to interpret the outcomes and to avoid misunderstanding we have to put both sides together. This is not just a question of adding the two sides together as independent factors. What is involved is a process of interaction. For example age may appear to be a key factor in explaining labour market outcomes. How could this happen? It has little to do with age as a biological phenomenon or even as a social phenomenon constituted through supply side pressures. Age becomes salient in employer selection of workers only as a result of specific social processes - in certain places, at certain times, with respect to certain groups of workers - perhaps because employers are able to be more selective and to prefer employees who can either repay over a longer period any firm-specific investment in training or be more resilient in the face of intensified work processes. A similar point can be made for sex, which becomes salient as a result of specific social processes that 'gender' aspects of the employment relation. Analysis cannot rest content with an enumeration of supply side variables but must explore these social processes that make factors such as age and sex become salient for labour market outcomes.

EARNINGS AND QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE

Even after a job has been found there may be a continuing loss of earnings if the new job pays less than the old did. US data indicate both this fact (OECD 1990) and that the size of the earnings loss declines over time as workers apparently move up the wages hierarchy again (see also Deery et al 1986). In part the loss of earnings arises from the fact that many re-employed workers are employed for part time work (Curtain and Hopkins 1986). Equally there is evidence of loss of occupational status on average after retrenchment, particularly for skilled blue collar workers (Deery et al 1986; Wooden and Sloan 1987b; for British evidence, see Daniel 1990). There is also some suggestion that previously retrenched workers are more prone to

renewed retrenchment than other workers (Wooden 1988; Gershuny and Vogler 1994). This effect would follow from last in-first out hiring and firing practices. As the OECD (1990) summarises the situation: on average new jobs are accepted at the price of a fall in pay, a certain deskilling and poorer working conditions and career prospects.

In Australia there has been a long run tendency for the proportion of jobs that are not standard to increase (Campbell and Burgess 1993; Campbell 1994). Such jobs are not full time, or not permanent or not waged employment. In August 1995, approximately 54% of employed females and 36% of employed males were in non-standard jobs. If in existing workplaces, unions and other workers' organisations are able to defend (with at least some effect) the employment conditions of continuing workers, then it is likely that new entrants to the workforce and unemployed people being rehired by a new employer will bear the brunt of this ongoing change in employment conditions. After all, from the standpoint of the firm, entry is the time at which an employee's conditions are most directly amenable to management initiative. The level of recruitment can be varied relatively freely; the definition of ideal candidates, the mechanisms of selection, and the criteria of selection can also be chosen relatively freely.

Nevertheless some surveys do find that workers rate their current job more highly than the one they were retrenched from (eg Wooden and Sloan 1987b), especially if they have managed to move on from their first job after retrenchment. Indeed half of the workers surveyed by Wooden and Sloan agreed (or strongly agreed) that retrenchment had been a good thing for them - though these tended to be the people who had found new jobs quickly. These positive views may derive from the age of the plant from which the workers were retrenched and reflect the social relations in a plant that has been targeted for closure. In addition, a period of unemployment during which training is provided and paid for can provide opportunities that are otherwise foreclosed by work. The stories recounted in the history of the Skill-Link program give a good sense of the liberation felt by those who for the first time were being given support to learn English and some skills (Harper ed. 1992). Of course, if those people had been supported to do that training before or during their employment, they might have been even more liberated.

CRITIQUE: LABOUR MARKET ASSUMPTIONS

The review of Australian studies of labour market outcomes for retrenched workers points to two significant conceptual problems: the conceptualisation of variables in the analysis of labour market outcomes and the conceptualisation of labour market outcomes. Some case studies offer assistance in overcoming these problems of conceptualisation. Recognition of the problems and broader research designs generate quite a different understanding of labour market processes. In this section we draw on some studies conducted in Europe to illustrate that broader understanding.

Labour market histories

The first problem is in principle readily solved. It requires that labour market outcomes be conceptualised as labour market experience and be examined through labour market histories in the entire period after retrenchment. Resolution of the problem can take place through collection of data on individual labour market histories after retrenchment in a recall survey and through ordering of these histories with categories sensitive to the significance of different labour market patterns (including the pattern of intermittent or 'chequered' employment or 'permanent temporariness'). Several studies have used this idea, producing novel information about the manner in which labour markets operate.

One of the earliest attempts to move beyond the standard focus on personal characteristics draws on a study of workers retrenched when British Steel plants in Wales reduced their staffing levels in 1980 (Harris et al 1987; see also Harris et al 1985). Harris et al stress that labour market outcomes for retrenched workers are the result of the relation between two sides of the market. It is necessary to look at the type of labour demand and the recruiting behaviour of employers as well as the characteristics of workers and their job seeking behaviour. This is particularly true in a loose labour market - "in a loose market jobs are acquired as a result of employers' techniques in labour search as well as workers' techniques of job search" (1987: 177). In such a situation labour market outcomes do not depend simply on supply side factors - the standard variables such as age and skill become poor predictors of labour market success (1987: 177). Unfortunately Harris and his co-workers do better in diagnosing this operation of the labour market than in studying it, since the study remains tied to its sample of retrenched workers and can only grapple with the problem indirectly. Thus they attempt to expand the range of variables to incorporate further factors that could become pertinent in the labour market conditions of South Wales of the time - including social identity and network location in job search. In addition, they attempt to conduct the empirical analysis and interpret results with appropriate sensitivity to the significance of labour market conditions.

An important conceptual innovation in the study derives from an awareness of the importance of labour market context. The definition of labour market outcome is expanded to include not just labour market status at the time of the interview but the set of changes in labour market statuses over the course of the period since retrenchment - what they term 'labour market histories' (Harris et al 1987: 178-179, 186-194) or 'labour market careers' (1987: 17). In other words labour market outcome is understood broadly as labour market experience. A substantial minority of respondents had variegated labour market histories; a fact that was more important than their labour market status at the time of interview (which could of course vary and assimilate them with others who had been continuously unemployed or continuously employed). Several different labour market statuses are distinguished (employment, self-employment, unemployment, retraining, withdrawal and other). Labour market histories can be measured by counting both the number of different statuses and the

total number of statuses in the period after retrenchment (1987: 186-194). What Harris et al call 'chequered' labour market histories formed, after withdrawal, the largest category of labour market outcomes for the respondents (see 1987: 192-4, 202-208). The 'discovery' of the chequered pattern is the most important result of the study (1987: 192), linked as it is to changes in labour demand, eg the growth of sub-contracting firms around the periphery of BSC's steel making operations (though chequered labour market histories are by no means confined to employment with sub-contractors).

Another significant contribution is a Swedish study of about 3400 employees retrenched from 17 manufacturing plants (8 closures, 9 cutbacks) throughout Sweden in the early 1980s (Gonas 1990a; 1990b; Gonas and Westin 1993). With respect to labour market outcomes, the authors observe that it is inadequate to concentrate on arbitrary endpoints and they attest to the importance of understanding individual labour market histories in the entire period after retrenchment (Gonas 1990a: 185). The study offers detailed data on the work history of individuals over a two year period, using a framework that measures time spent in five status groups: permanent employment, temporary employment, unemployment, support in a labour market policy programme and training, and others.

Two results of this study appear particularly pertinent. First, as in South Wales, a pattern of intermittent employment is highly important. This is called 'permanent temporariness', a repeated rotation between temporary labour market situations (Gonas and Westin 1993: 435). Second, labour market outcomes are highly gender-specific. Compared with thirty years ago, women are more likely to stay in the labour market after losing their jobs but are more likely to fall into the pattern of permanent temporariness and more likely to encounter disadvantage in other stages and aspects of the retrenchment process and its aftermath. This is due to 'gendering' processes in the Swedish labour market, including the specific gender structure in the local labour market when retrenched workers are searching for a new job (Gonas and Westin 1993: 442-447).

Davies and Esseveld build on this conceptualisation of 'permanent temporariness' in their study of the experiences of workers retrenched from a food processing plant in Sweden in 1982. They observe that for the women they studied, "redundancy/unemployment was followed by a complex patchwork of short periods of temporary work, relief work, labour market training programmes, intermittent unemployment and so on" (1989: 232). They go on to challenge the adequacy of a static approach limited to a dichotomy of employment and unemployment and offer a model to interpret the forms of movement, in particular through what they call the 'grey' area between permanent employment and absolute unemployment (233-238).

Another perspective on the issue of intermittent employment is found in the major longitudinal study of the unemployed in the United Kingdom conducted by Daniel (1990). The study followed over two and a half years a group of approximately 8000 people who registered as unemployed in one week in May 1980. The study stresses

the need to understand unemployment flows. It observes that in addition to the long-term unemployed the unemployed stock is largely made up of those who are *recurrently* unemployed, ie who move in and out of short-term, insecure, poorly paid jobs.

The work of Harris et al and Daniel in the UK has been supplemented recently by what is to date the most ambitious attempt to understand the dynamics of a labour market. The Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (SCELI) incorporated a Work Attitudes/ Histories survey in six British medium sized towns. In each town in 1986, 1000 people were interviewed for this survey, together with a representative sample of 300 employers. The respondents - randomly chosen from the entire population rather than selected because of unemployment - were asked to provide information about their entire work history. The result is a longitudinal data set of rare detail. Since the studies reinterviewed 300 of the original interviewees nine months after the main round of interviewing, the capacity to test causal inferences is particularly strong. The published studies demonstrate very clearly the power of longitudinal data in assessing directions of causation. A number of books have been produced providing details of the findings of the SCELI; *Social Change and the Experience of Unemployment* is the most useful for our purposes (but see also Rubery and Wilkinson eds. 1994).

Gershuny and Vogler (1994) provide an analytically complex and theoretically rich study of the determinants of labour market outcomes. They first measure labour market status by two variables: whether employed or not, and the social prestige attached to an occupation. They observe that both measures of labour market status depend in part on initial conditions, that is on parents' social class, years of full time education and the prestige score of the first job. These effects, which appear to have strengthened over time, are clearly visible even fifteen years after a person entered the labour market. However, current labour market status also depends on status in the immediate past. Thus, occupational status has an increasing effect on the risk of unemployment as time in the labour market passes; but the major determinant of unemployment in any year is the unemployment record of the immediate past (an effect that is not simply due to a spell of unemployment may continue from the immediate past to the current year). A spell of unemployment substantially increases the risk of further spells of unemployment.

The data provided by Gershuny and Vogler (1994) can illuminate the findings of Australian studies about experiences after retrenchment. Instead of a simple list of factors affecting the length of time taken to find a new job, Gershuny and Vogler have provided a structure that indicates how the past influences the present, how that is, initial conditions and the more immediate past circumstances affect current labour market outcomes. This advance illustrates the strength of longitudinal studies. By contrast with the methods used by Daniel (1990), Harris et al (1985; 1987) and the Swedish research, the methods used by Gershuny and Vogler do not directly address the issue of temporary employment and careers of intermittent employment. Whether more is to be learned from analysis of episodes of employment (as in Gershuny and Vogler) or from analysis of categories of employment histories (as in Harris et al and

the Swedish work) remains an open question. What is clear is that either approach is more powerful than existing cross-sectional methods.

The studies of Harris et al, Gonas, Davies and Esseveld and Daniel attempt to build a broader conceptualisation of labour market outcomes. Instead of regarding a labour market outcome as a state (employment status) at any one point in time, they identify an outcome as a pattern of employment statuses or a history of employment statuses. In this way, people's experiences are classified not simply as unemployed, employed, not in the labour force and so forth; but as permanently employed, intermittently employed, long term unemployed and so on. This is certainly a richer conceptualisation than the norm. However, it raises two methodological problems. First: is it the case that there exists a small set of histories and that individuals' experiences can be unambiguously classified into one member of that set? Indeed, the rules for defining histories and for assigning individuals to those histories are remarkably general in the studies conducted so far. Second: how much history is needed? Alternative conceptualisations of the dynamics of labour market experiences (for example, those of Burchell 1994, Gallie and Vogler 1994b and Gershuny and Vogler 1994) make the unit of analysis a transition - for example employment-unemployment, unemployment-employment or employment-unemployment-employment. The study of such transitions can indicate how much history is needed in order to understand what happens to people now: how much of the past do we need to know? If the study of transitions indicates that we need to know a lot about people's past experiences in order to understand their present, and if the past is a powerful predictor of the present, then it is possible to conclude that history is a relevant unit of analysis. If in addition people's histories differ in systematic ways, then it is possible to conclude that there exist categories of labour market experience. These inferences need to be empirical rather than logical. Despite the path-breaking work reviewed here, we are still only part way to understanding the appropriate categories for analysis.

Labour market conditions

The second problem of conceptualisation - the conceptualisation of variables in the analysis of labour market outcomes - is less tractable, since it points to the need to go beyond a sample survey of individuals and to understand what are often loosely bundled together as 'labour market conditions'. A thoroughgoing solution to the problem would require analysis of the demand side of relevant labour markets, including in particular an empirical analysis of employer recruitment policies - using the sort of information collected by the designers of SCEL in Britain (see in particular the papers in Rubery and Wilkinson eds. 1994). However, in the absence of such an analysis, it is possible at least to minimise the effects of the neglect of 'labour market conditions'. This can occur first of all through appropriate sensitivity in the interpretation of the results of analysis. Beyond this it should be possible to draw in theoretical and empirical material relating to the variability in the conditions and processes in different labour markets. Such variability should not of course surprise social scientists and geographers, who have long been aware of the

importance of local labour markets (eg Peck 1989; Morrison 1990; Hanson and Pratt 1992).

In a recent report published by the International Labour Office (ILO), Bosch (1992: 18-30) offers a conceptualisation of the factors influencing the consequences of mass retrenchment. Pointing to case studies, mainly of plant closures, he echoes Wooden's observation that there are considerable differences in the evidence of the results of mass retrenchment. He cites the example of the unemployment rate amongst respondents in the year after closure of an enterprise, which ranges from 0% (a Swedish shipyard) to 87% (an English shipyard). The peak unemployment rate in the country or region is one important influence on these differences, but there are others. Bosch refers here to the structure of skills in the labour market, conceptualised in terms of a division into unstructured, internal, and occupational labour markets. He also points to age and health restrictions in employer recruitment strategies. Cutting across the previously cited factors are the effects of discrimination by sex, nationality and race. He cites too the situation in the local labour market, conceptualised in terms of two distinct types - a geographically isolated, small labour market dominated by a single industry or firm or a larger, geographically denser labour market. There is, furthermore, a difference between closure and continued trading, which can shape the composition of the pool of retrenched workers. Most generally, Bosch cites the influence of the type of structural change. This is a general heading which encompasses factors such as the changes in the sectoral composition of employment, the relative growth of employment in small establishments and enterprises, and the changes in the forms of employment contracts - all of which affect who is hiring and firing and in what way. Lastly he draws attention to the impact of government labour market and employment policy, which directly structures the opportunities available to retrenched workers. This list of factors has the advantage of drawing attention to the (variable) social processes in labour markets, the interaction of which will determine which personal attributes and forms of personal behaviour of retrenched workers become salient in affecting their re-employment opportunities. These social processes and the forms of their interaction can vary widely, contributing to highly variable results for retrenched workers.

The danger of misunderstanding arises from treating variables such as age and sex as if they were independent of the social context. The danger can be seen in Wooden's review (1988). He reviews case studies that analyse labour market outcomes for retrenched workers in terms of a set of standard variables and their relative impact within an individual sample of retrenched workers. His conclusions on the strength or weakness of the evidence are based on comparison *amongst* the case studies, though they derive from disparate labour markets (throughout the industrialised world) at disparate times (from the 1930s to the 1980s). The conclusions seem to rely on the covert assumption that the studies are comparable because they are measuring similar factors (personal attributes such as age and sex or features of individual behaviour such as job search) in similar situations (amongst a pool of retrenched workers and searching for alternative employment). This

assumption is not sustainable. On the contrary the comparability of the studies needs to be properly theorised.

This theorisation is essential given the results from empirical studies of employment and unemployment in Britain. First, Gallie and White (1994) comment that employers' policies cannot be easily categorised. Firms could not be classified into segments with systematic combinations of policies, nor were policies systematically related to size, industry, location and the like. The behaviour of individual employers is complex and not readily understood in terms of the usual models of the labour market. Second, employees' perceptions of labour market conditions do not always coincide with employer perceptions of working conditions (Gallie and White 1994); in particular, segmentation of labour supply and changing conditions of supply seem to influence firm's employment policies as much as their internal organisational needs do (Rubery 1994). The supply and demand sides of labour markets interact, as employers' policies adjust to supply conditions and as supply conditions respond to employers' demands. As these interactions are in the first place local and specific to particular times, objective measures such as age and gender are unlikely to denote similar labour market positions in different times and places.

Some pitfalls remain in the use of sample surveys. In her report on the experiences of a group of married women retrenched during the partial closure of a clothing factory in South Wales in 1980-81, Callender warns about the gendered nature of the respondents' interpretation of the standard categories of labour market analysis, for example the reluctance of the women to define themselves as 'unemployed' (Callender 1987a; see also 1987b). In Australia, as in most other countries, an element of the formal definition of being unemployed is that one is actively seeking a job in a particular way. There is evidence that this view of unemployment is inappropriate for understanding the position of women in the labour market. The misunderstanding is identified by Callender (1987a).

Callender notes first the context of the job search behaviour. The retrenched women did not comprise a random sample of the workers in the factory. They were selected and seemed to be disadvantaged in human capital terms. (Similarly Davies and Esseveld 1989 have described in some detail how in a Swedish food processing factory reasoning about skill, lack of absenteeism and group working patterns, effectively discriminated against immigrant women and women with young children.) Rates of unemployment in the region were very high. The women were constrained by financial considerations, eg household income, likely wage levels, and costs of travel to work, and by domestic responsibilities.

Most of the women were committed to getting another job - almost any job. Equally, though, most denied that they were looking for work. They seemed to regard unemployment as a male characteristic: the women already had a full time job - looking after the house. Others thought of unemployment as connoting registration or receiving benefit. Yet others deferred to men's need for work.

Perhaps the most important of Callender's evidence concerns job search strategies. Three strategies were common (the local newspaper carried few job advertisements).

- 1 Direct application to employers, especially soon after retrenchment. This was costly and frustrating and soon abandoned.
- 2 Registering at a Jobcentre was the most common strategy. Half of the women were eligible for unemployment benefit. Many rejected this strategy on grounds of wanting self-sufficiency and freedom from officialdom or on grounds of rejecting the label of unemployment.
- 3 Social networks - family and friends - proved the most effective method of getting a job (see also Martin and Wallace 1984). The women's networks were family-based and local; they typically did not include work mates after retrenchment. This pattern seems to reflect the time constraints imposed by paid work and a job at home and by the discontinuity common to women's employment.

The networks provided both a moral gain (through a 'good word') and a technical source of information. Networks constitute a source of information about jobs when a person is not searching in the direct formal sense. They are popular since there was little bureaucracy involved. They were cheap in terms of time, energy and money, provided inside information about the workplace, and offered an understanding of the constraints on women's employment. In the end, what seemed to distinguish the women who got jobs from those who did not was not their personal characteristics but the efficacy of their networks. And that was a problem, because few of the women's kin were themselves employed and those that were had typically female jobs: low paid, unskilled, temporary. Thus the networks provided restricted information that itself constrained the jobs that the women could conceivably find.

INTERPRETATION AND IMPLICATIONS

It is important to emphasise that structural change within a corporation - a change in the division of labour - does not of itself imply retrenchment of workers. The burden of structural change can be borne in different ways and in different degrees by workers, the state and corporations. Retrenchment is a process of structural change that imposes much of the burden on workers - though that burden can be ameliorated by income support and retraining policies.

Retrenchment has a variety of effects on workers: shock, loss of income, psychological ill health, isolation. The strength of these effects depends on a variety of factors.

- 1 Context. The availability and type of jobs in the local labour market in relation to the number of retrenched workers might be expected to provide a primary determinant of workers' chances of getting another job soon. Yet there has been little systematic study of this effect.

2 Behaviour of employers who are retrenching. Employers can offer different degrees of support and lengths of notice provided to the workers who are to be retrenched. It has been claimed - though with little evidence - that this behaviour affects the future labour market experience of retrenched workers. Employers may also select those who are to be retrenched, who could be expected to be those least likely to be hired by other employers.

3 Behaviour of employers who are hiring. The characteristics they seek in relation to the characteristics possessed by retrenched workers will influence the probabilities of success in job hunting. Age, education, skill, previous job tenure and English language capacity may all influence employers' attitudes to potential employees.

4 State support. Income maintenance, retraining allowances and assistance in searching for jobs may provide freedom for workers to gain some benefit from a period out of employment.

5 Personal characteristics of the retrenched workers. Ethnicity and gender both seem to have some bearing on the manner in which jobs are sought and the intensity with which retrenched workers seek to remain in what is formally regarded as the labour market.

Three observations need to be made about the studies and about methods of improving the capacity of empirical work to inform theory. First, longitudinal studies provide far more powerful methods than do cross-sectional studies for identifying patterns of cause and effect and causally ordering the simple list of variables provided in the previous paragraph. Second, in many studies the object of attention has been to understand the length of time for which retrenched workers are unemployed. That object pays little attention to the fact that the opposite of unemployment - 'employment' - includes a great variety of jobs. The labour market is not dichotomised into the employed and the unemployed. The boundary between those in and those not in the labour market is itself blurred, and between absolute unemployment and permanent full time work lie a whole host of job types. Furthermore, a person's history after retrenchment is a more accurate indicator of outcome than is labour market status at a single point in time. Third, the standard categories of analysis - age, gender, educational qualifications and the like - are not independent of social context. It is the behaviour of employers and workers that makes these categories salient within labour markets. Since the structuring of demands for labour itself depends on the characteristics of supply, these fixed categories are likely to have meanings that differ in different places and in different times.

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