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CHANGING EMPLOYMENT UNDER A
CHANGING MODE OF DEVELOPMENT

With special reference to Palmerston North

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ABSTRACT

The old Fordist mode of development is being replaced by a Flexible mode of development. A new regime of accumulation, modes of regulation and technologies are being formed giving rise to new ways of organising business. Firms are restructuring to maintain profitability and this is having profound effects on labour and the way we work.

Employment is becoming more casualised through increased use of part-time, temporary and sub-contracted labour. New social groups are being brought into the workforce and new productive spaces are being created to complement a flexible business organisation.

At a regional level, the experiences are dependent upon historical and geographical conditions which give rise to regional uniqueness. Palmerston North displays regional uniqueness in terms of a high dependence on the Government sector and on service industries. It is aided by its geographical location and amenities such as Massey University. However, because of its place in a capitalist nation and global economy it is subject to similar forces that affect other regions thereby producing similar employment patterns.

Such employment patterns include a decline in full-time employment with rises in part-time employment, self-employment and unemployment. Those employed in the service industry are increasing along with those employed in managerial or administrative occupations. Manufacturing employment is decreasing. These trends are reshaping work and regions.

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LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Classification of Production Processes	7
2	Government Sector Employers	38

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1	Mode of Development	5
2	Fordism versus Flexibility	16
3	Map of Palmerston North	
	Urban Subdivisions	36
4	Major Employers in Palmerston North (92)	39
5	Work Status in Palmerston North (91)	40
6	Occupational Distribution in PN (86 & 91)	41
7	Industrial Structure of the Workplace (91)	42
8	Employment Status of PN and NZ (91)	43
9	Work Status of PN and NZ (91)	43
10	Work Status of Major Cities (91)	46
11	Industry of Major Cities (91)	47
12	Occupational Structure of Major Cities (91)	48
13	Full-time (81-91)	50
14	Part-time (81-91)	51
15	Unemployment (81-91)	53
16	Self-employment (81-91)	54
17	Changes in Occupations in PN (86-91)	57

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
1	ABSTRACT	i
2	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
3	LIST OF TABLES	iii
4	LIST OF FIGURES	iii
5	TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
6	INTRODUCTION	1
7	CHAPTER ONE	
	-THEORY	
	Introduction	4
	Concepts	5
	Fordism	8
	Flexibility	9
8	CHAPTER TWO	
	-CASE STUDIES	
	Introduction	17
	Production Relocation	18
	Casualisation	27
	Reskilling	30
9	CHAPTER THREE	
	-REGIONAL ANALYSIS	
	Introduction	35
	Context	37
	Change	49
10	CHAPTER FOUR	
	-CONCLUSION	60
11	BIBLIOGRAPHY	66

INTRODUCTION

The society we live in today is very different from the society of a decade ago and those changes are in part due to a changing mode of development and changing work patterns. The area of formal paid work is being reduced whilst the area of informal unpaid work is increasing giving the false notion of increased leisure time for people and the ability to arrange work around other pursuits. As will be demonstrated in this thesis the changes affecting work - more specifically employment, are due to a change in the mode of development as capital regains control over labour and further subordinates it for the purposes of accumulation.

Over the past decade, as recognised by geographers and government agencies (Martin:1986; Department of Labour:1993), the number of people involved in full-time employment has declined whilst the number of people in part-time employment has increased along with those who are unemployed. More people are employed in the service industry than in manufacturing and numbers are continuing to fall in manufacturing. Professional, managerial and technical employment has increased whilst employment in clerical and sales has decreased (Martin:1986; Department of Labour:1983). These changes are directly linked to changes in the capitalist mode of production as are the changes that are affecting work.

Employment, which is paid and therefore has value, a value which is socially created, can only be examined under the realms of a capitalist mode of production through the examination of capital/labour relations. Capitalism is based on 'private property, the extraction of surplus value from workers who sell their labour-power and the production and circulation of commodities bearing the stamp of value' (Walker:1985:84). The process of production is for profit, which is capital accumulation and physical goods and it is profit which determines the production of these goods and services therefore conflict

between capital and labour is inherent in the structural relationship formed by capitalism.

Production is a social process and involves social relations formed outside the workplace which are constantly reinforced within it. One such social relation is that of gender relations. Patriarchy is the word used to define the subordination of women by men and involved in the changing work environment is the further subordination of women as capital uses the current imbalances to further increase profit.

The focus on paid labour is admittedly at the expense of unpaid labour and the effect of this is to do what many researchers have done in the past, and continue to do today, which is to neglect the work done by a majority of women thus denying the substantial role many women play in the economy and providing an unbalanced view of society. Yet, it should be made clear before falling into the same error of others, women also play a large role in the paid labour force.

The difficulty in reporting on unpaid labour is the inadequacy of official statistics in recording such work. This reveals the tendency of capitalist societies to only value paid labour and the patriarchal way in which statistical data is collected. Patriarchy undervalues unpaid labour because it is seen as typically female and in doing so misses the importance unpaid work plays in the economy.

The lack of official statistics is also a reason for not examining the informal economy, as such a study would require much work from ground level, that is an in depth look at the connections formed by people in their everyday lives and this is outside the timeframe of this thesis. However, there are direct links between the formal and informal economy and the theory which will be used in this thesis would be adequate for bringing the two together. 'Deskilling in the formal sector is matched by reskilling in informal work' (Pahl, 1985:249), as people develop new ways of survival. Though for some the use of the informal

economy is not for survival but for a more natural lifestyle, especially those who are middle class. Thus the capitalist relations spill over into the informal economy revealing that both formal and informal are very much dependent on and at the will of capitalist relations of production.