

JOBS — CASUALISATION

Statement

HON CHARLES SMITH (East Metropolitan) [6.28 pm]: While we are talking about mental health, I just want to say how much I am looking forward to the government looking after our medically retired police at some point in the near future. As I am sure all members know, in my experience, every police officer suffers with post-traumatic stress disorder to some greater or lesser extent. Every serving and former member, including me, suffers with those issues.

I am not here to talk about mental health; I am going to talk about another matter that is close to my heart and which I have been pursuing over the last few weeks, which is a gradual trend that has been developing across Western Australia. In recent decades there has been a sharp fall in the share of full-time employment together with an ongoing and alarming trend of casualisation. There has been a slow death of full-time work across Western Australia.

It has come to my attention through various reports in the last six months or so that the Australian labour force is becoming more and more casualised—that is, the loss of full-time work to part-time and casual work. In May it was revealed that Australia tops the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development for insecure work. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 40 years ago there were 5.5 full-time workers for every part-time worker. Today there are just 2.2 full-time workers for every part-time worker. Analysis by leading public policy expert Peter Whiteford shows Australia has the highest proportion of temporary employees in the OECD. He has also stated that the latest available international data from 2012 showed that in 2012 Australia had the highest proportion of temporary employees.

Casual workers are more likely to suffer a substantial deficit in their rights and benefits compared with their counterparts employed on a permanent basis. For example, they are far more vulnerable to practices such as summary dismissal, especially during their probation periods; last-minute variations in their hours and schedules; poor treatment; and underpayment. Additionally, they are likely to be vulnerable in employee development, skill formation and promotion. Amazingly, around 17 per cent of casual workers are believed to have been with their current employer for more than five years.

Although some casual workers choose to be casual and are satisfied with their work, the vast majority of casual workers work on a casual basis as a way to find further permanent or full-time jobs. They want job security and wage growth, and I agree with Geoffrey Harcourt, professor of economics at the University of New South Wales, when he states —

... “giving top priority to full employment is the moral prerequisite for any just and equitable society”.

Policymakers continuously tell the public that there is a skills shortage in Australia. If there are indeed skills shortages in Western Australia and the wider nation, why is wage growth stagnating? That does not agree with the law of supply and demand. If there is a shortage, surely the value of work will increase. What we have seen over the last 10 years is wages declining in real terms. The reason is simple: many of these so-called skills shortages are artificial; they are simply ways to get in visa workers who are paid less than Australian workers. As the ABC reported in 2017, the majority of foreign workers are paid below national award rates. The result is that qualified Australians are unemployed. The ugly truth about our skilled immigration system is that it is not only destroying career prospects for our university graduates, but also discouraging employers from training our young people in favour of hiring cheap, ready-made workers from abroad. Australians want job security and successive governments like to promise that. How about governments encourage a change in our employment culture? Why do we not stop letting growth lobbyists tell governments that they need hundreds of thousands of employees in a field when there are many qualified Australians struggling to find work?