

# YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND CRIME

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And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

Matt. 20: 6-7

"Youth," said Aristotle, "is easily deceived, because it is quick to hope."

Australian youth have grown up in pervasive prosperity. They were weaned in an atmosphere of political liberty and social consciousness. Even before they were out of their cradles, it seemed that a benevolent and generous society would watch over them until they were in their graves. Swelled by the postwar baby boom, their numbers alone make them formidable. They have tried to create their own distinct and driving way of life. So intensely have they been probed and studied — and catered to — that they at times seem more like cult objects than kids. Small wonder, amid the diminished dreams of the 1970s, that they should now feel deceived.

Some of them are saying so with a fresh and sometimes violent anger. But most of them are ominously quiet. Except among fringes, the voices of Australian youth have rarely been more uncertain and muted with fear. More bewildered than belligerent, the young feel isolated and at odds with a society that reared them for a different world. They find their education irrelevant and the few available jobs dull and badly paid. They have been led to expect more.

These days, our unemployed youth feel alienated from employment and a sense of participation in a society that has led them to expect a different fate.

The current high level of unemployment is the result of a number of factors including the general level of economic activity, changes in the structure of job opportunities resulting from economic and technological developments, increasing participation of women in the workforce, high juvenile wages, attitudes of employers and the young themselves, low productivity of some of the young; are deficiencies in schooling.

Nowadays unemployment, with few exceptions, has filtered through to every socio-economic and occupational group in Australia. While certain groups, such as the handicapped and migrants, are specially disadvantaged it is youth that is first and hardest hit by unemployment.

In Australia, whenever unemployment reaches a high level, young people are forced to bear an inequitable portion of the burden. Regardless of sex or geographic location the percentage unemployment rates for youth constantly exceed those of the total unemployed.

Young people seem to be particularly vulnerable to unemployment in the transition phase from school to work. Typically the unemployed youth left school at the minimum legal age with no special qualifications and sought employment in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations.

The structural changes in the market have removed many of the simpler less skilled jobs which have traditionally been the entry point of young people into the workforce. The

advantages that youth used to wield in the area of pay awards have now been largely eroded and in times of high unemployment mature and experienced adults are competing for the same jobs at relatively little extra cost to the employer.

Youth are also penalized by a demographic trend marked by the arrival on the labour market of a large number of young people who are products of the post-war baby boom. In Australia, between 1954-1974, the 15-24 year old age group increased by 89% while the total population increased only 48%.

How can Australian society justify high levels of unemployment?

Greg Woods puts it this way:

If the rich can persuade the poor that the reasons for the existence of a wide gulf are legitimate, then dissatisfaction with the condition of society will not be manifest. Throughout history ruling classes have sought to promulgate ideologies legitimising their exercise of power and their claims to economic advantages . . . Relative deprivation will be a spur to crime and disorder only in societies where the justifying ideology fails to persuade the relatively poor that their situation is, although unfortunate, necessary.

In Australia in the 1970s it is possible to speculate that crime and disorder have been less apparent than they might have been because of the operation of such a "justifying ideology". This ideology has had two parts: on the one hand, it has told the unemployed they are dole bludgers and that there are plenty of jobs if they look for them; on the other hand, it has blamed the recession on high wages and persuaded workers that the nation's interests will be best served if their share of national income, goods and services declines. As long as this ideology persists, social control can be maintained. 'If the unemployed can be kept in the grip of an ideology which emphasises that they should live upon "daily rations" and know their "proper stations";' Greg Woods has argued, 'then crime caused by the condition of unemployment will be kept to a minimum.' One thing is certain, however. The justifying ideology in Australia is fraudulent and, as unemployment remains high in the 1980s, will become increasingly seen as such.

In order to understand the ramification of unemployment, let us first consider the meaning of work.

Perhaps Martin Luther can be credited — or discredited — for what we have called over the last 400 years the "Protestant work ethic". To support his opposition to church structure, Luther urged laymen to fulfil their secular calling for Christian service through their daily labors.

Luther's ethic has persisted. Work, we believe, is morally good, unemployment is bad, and being unwilling to work is sinful.

In a paper in *The Futurist* magazine in April, 1975, Professor Robert Strom of the Faculty of Education, Arizona State University, found these contradictions about the Protestant work ethic.

The productive capacity of automation makes full employment unnecessary; but to be unemployed is shameful.

Paid employment is the only way for a person to obtain dignity; but automation promises to displace job holders.

Workers are expected to find their sense of self-worth from a job; but automation makes jobs routine and boring.

Automation leads to an abundance of leisure; but since people regard non-work activity as lacking in value, they naturally experience guilt and self-recrimination when leisure is extended.

Educator Robert Strom makes a delicate but valid differentiation between what he terms "a work" and "a job": "Slowly our society is realising that what is important is not that each of us holds a job but that all of us have work. Many people who have jobs lack work and therefore a sense of satisfaction and self-pride."

Strom points out that the public will resist paying the unemployed, and the jobless will feel guilt and self-derogation through accepting money they have not worked for.

"To escape from this dilemma we must prepare tomorrow's adults for life in a leisure society.

"... Perhaps the schools can begin this process by presenting students with two basic questions throughout the learning process. Unlike the present arrangement which urges young people to decide 'What is to be my job?', the goal could be enlarged to 'What is to be my work?' and 'What am I going to do with my life?'.

"Young people are already abandoning the Protestant work ethic, the belief that a man's dignity is dependent upon his economic production. To the question 'What are you going to be?' the youngsters now say 'I already am — and you should recognise me as a person whether I'm employed or not'."

Let us now examine work in itself.

What aspects of work do people find satisfying?

1. Work provides economic satisfaction. Work enables people to survive physically. It gives them the purchasing power needed to obtain food, shelter, clothing and other necessities. But the returns from work also provide other satisfactions.

Many people use their earnings to purchase homes, cars and other luxuries. For some, this meets a need to live in pleasant surroundings. For some, this satisfies a need to impress other people.

Work earnings also provide a sense of security. Many people obtain considerable satisfaction from knowing that their savings will provide them with some protection in the future.

2. Work provides social satisfaction. Work enables a lot of people to fulfil their social needs. At work they can be with others, talk to them, get to know them, and form friendships. In many cases, the favourable feelings that people develop through working together result in their continuing to see one another outside of employment.

3. Work provides identity. Many people find an answer to the ever-present question "Who am I?" through their work. They respond "I am an electrician", "I am a secretary", and so on.

This may seem like a strange satisfaction to obtain from work. But think for a moment about the terrible blow to their self-respect and self-confidence that many unemployed persons experience. Often they feel bitter,

hopeless and depressed because they are unable to perform traditional roles.

Beyond providing an identity, work can satisfy people's needs for status and respect among their co-workers and in the community. Part of this stature and respect may come from the way in which they perform their work tasks. Good performance may be viewed with approval by fellow workers and supervisors. This gives people the feeling that they are doing something worthwhile.

4. Work regulates life's activities. Work can relieve boredom, but for some it serves another important purpose. It brings a sense of orderliness to their lives. They know what they will be doing today, tomorrow and the day after that.
5. Work provides a sense of achievement. For many people work satisfies their need for mastery or achievement over situations with people, ideas or things. Consider the feelings of pleasure or pride you obtained when you first drove a car or rode a bicycle by yourself. These are similar to the feelings some people experience from their work achievements. They may take pride in being able to perform their work tasks quickly and efficiently. They may be proud of the way in which they supervise and manage other people. They may take pride in the final product they turn out.

6. Work provides a sense of usefulness. Work helps some people satisfy their need to contribute to something worthwhile. They might feel that they are helping other people. They might feel that the product they are helping to produce is a valuable one.

But aside from fulfilling a need to be useful, work satisfies some people's needs to belong. They might take pride in the fact that they are part of a company that has a long history of service in the community. Or they might feel good about being known as a member of a certain group within the company.

7. Work provides an outlet for interests and aptitudes. People who choose their work carefully often find that it provides them with an opportunity to use their special aptitudes and talents. It also provides them with a chance to do things that interest them. This can produce a number of different satisfactions. For some, it meets a need to do something in which they excel. It may meet a need to be creative. It may meet a need to experience constant personal growth.

However the unemployed youth of Australia are being denied these fundamental rights.

Unemployment carries with it a negative social stigma. This is a product of the values that western society holds as to the meaning, nature and role of work. Working in a structured job is perceived as a social and moral duty and is also the means by which a person achieves and reinforces individual and social identity. Because work is so intimately related to the criteria of status and material reward, those who do not work, whether or not of their own choosing, are regarded with disdain or suspicion by society. The unemployed, by not participating in the work effort, are faced with negative feelings of self-rejection, feelings of inferiority and a deterioration of self-image.

What is the current evidence that shows that unemployment is harmful to the individual and society?

There is considerable evidence from many sources that the experience of being unemployed for prolonged periods has disruptive psychosocial consequences for the individual. Writers during the Great Depression of the 1930s described well-defined emotional stages through which the unemployed person seems to pass. At first, there is a stage of shock at becoming unemployed, followed by an optimistic phase during which the individual actively seeks work; and as their

efforts to find employment fail there results pessimism, anxiety and distress, that leads to a stage of fatalism and despair.

Windschuttle has linked unemployment to attempted suicide, heart disease mortality, infant mortality, domestic violence, alcoholism and marital breakdown.

From Melbourne, John Dunstan has tested a number of traditional theories about the causes of crime by examining the relationship of the following possible causes; poor housing, isolation, income, education, country of birth, social status and stability, and unemployment, to an index of 'pathology' comprising rates of mental illness, crime, delinquency, family breakdown, death rates, infant mortality, suicide, infectious disease and poverty. In a geographic breakdown into Melbourne local government areas, Dunstan found the variable most strongly linked to his index of pathology was unquestionably the male unemployment rate. The correlation between the possible causes and crime and delinquency was tested separately and **again** Dunstan found the most significantly related variable was the male unemployment rate.

The picture in Australia today is that, up to 30 per cent of all people arrested (depending on the State) are unemployed.

In some States juvenile crime has shot up by 60 per cent during the economic crisis.

In South Australia where accurate statistics are kept, offences committed by the unemployed were up by 240 per cent.

In New South Wales the Health Commission has found new 'epidemics' of heroin addiction in areas of high youth unemployment. Drug convictions in New South Wales have increased by between 60 and 80 per cent per year during the economic crisis. Teenage alcoholism has gone up by 15 per cent.

In Victoria the Mental Health Authority has found unusually high rates of attempted suicide among the unemployed.

Research shows that people without jobs are between seven and twelve times more likely to try to kill themselves than are those with jobs.

They also found that children of unemployed parents are twice as likely to be hospitalised with infectious diseases as other children. The infant mortality rate also increases during times of economic crisis. When the pay packet is no longer coming in and the rent or mortgage still has to be paid many families are forced to cut back on the food and clothing that is essential to good health. (Source for all the above: Unemployment. Social and Political Analysis of the Crisis. Penguin published Mar. 7, 1979. K. Windschuttle.)

Some unemployed have taken out their frustrations on other members of their families.

The Royal Commission on Human Relations found that unemployment was an important cause of wife battering and violence towards children.

Educationally, the President of the School Careers Advisers Association put it this way:

'In today's job climate, if a school leaver doesn't get a job in the first six months he (or she) has had it. Employers take on their trainees, apprentices and cadets at the beginning of the year. If a young person has to wait until the next intake, he (or she) is competing with a new batch of fresh school leavers.'

In Tasmania, the Mental Health Services Commission survey has concluded that:

1. The young unemployed constitute a specially disadvantaged group with unique needs.
2. On all measures of psychosocial adversity — financial problems, stigma and expression of psychological malaise — the unemployed fared much worse than an employed comparison group.
3. Commonly the background of the youth unemployed is

punctuated by early social disadvantage; parents who are unskilled workers or who are often deceased or pensioners; considerable experience of early parental deprivation and separation and trouble with the law. Despite similarities in length of education the employed comparison group had a more successful school career than their unemployed fellows.

4. The case of young unemployed women is special. Despite indications of a better education and a higher status previous employment, young women are disadvantaged in the work place by early educational experiences and sex-role stereotyping by society.
5. The stigma of youth unemployment is severe and attaches indiscriminately to the youth unemployed regardless of individual circumstance and the reality of job prospects. This stigma is associated with a devaluation and deterioration in close interpersonal relationships the unemployed enjoy with family and friends and seems to be the basis of the correlation between psychological malaise and stigma. In turn the unemployed seem to have adaptively filled up positions of closest intimacy in their personal networks with other friends, mostly unemployed. And how has the Federal Government responded to these facts?

With its cruel and heartless policy of attacking and punishing unemployed youth instead of unemployment itself.

This attitude has caused that area of the public service sector who work with unemployed people to fear for their safety. The latest get-tough direction has evoked the following response.

I may fear more hostility from the public if they decide to implement the Government's tougher dole test.

Employees in the Commonwealth Employment Service and the Social Security Department may ban the test unless they receive extra physical protection and back-up staff.

The State Secretary of the Administrative and Clerical Officers' Association, Mr Alex Magner, said physical violence had been used against Social Security employees several times.

"Verbal assaults are always on, but when the new test comes in, the friction will be enormous initially. It may cool down once people get used to it," he said.

Furthermore, the Federal Government's policies are ignoring job creation schemes on the grounds that they involve great increases in public expenditure.

However, a recent ILO study has shown that the reverse is true: it costs governments less to create new jobs than to keep paying them unemployment benefits. Statistical evidence from Belgium, Denmark, France, West Germany, Holland and Britain showed that governments gained more from income tax and social contributions and reduced expenditure on unemployment benefits than they spent on wages for people for whom they created jobs.

To understand why an unemployed youth could be provoked to violence, we need to put ourselves in their shoes for a moment, and experience life on the dole.

Let me give you two examples of case studies.

Davy sleeps in bus shelters, behind shops, on park benches. It has been his life for four years. He is just 19. Sometimes he gets a job for a week or two, but he can't remember having more than \$10 in his pocket. Well, not for long. With no home and no future worth thinking about, he has only one way of spending money — drinking himself numb or wiping out on drugs. Davy maintains he isn't as badly off as some other guys he knows. He isn't into heroin and he doesn't drink metho. Lots of kids do.

Skid row has a whole new look and Davy's story is not uncommon. Remember the tramps of the 1930s? Today, a lot of derelicts are teenagers or in the early 20s. Many are girls.

It's not only lack of money, a job and a home that makes a derelict. It's lack of hope. A few brushes with the law and perhaps a couple of years in reform school at 12 or 13 kill off hope pretty fast. So does a family which splits up leaving the kids without anyone who wants them. And the longer they are without a job, the less they expect to get one. Who's going to employ someone unskilled, under-educated and with a criminal record into the bargain? If they are also established alcoholics or drug addicts, chances are nil.

Two months ago, Davy drifted across to Perth. It didn't matter much where he was, life was still empty. But he'd had some hassles in Wollongong and heard jobs were easier to get in the West. He is one of about 50 unemployed teenagers who hitch across the Nullarbor every week under the same illusion. Perth now has an estimated 250 homeless teenagers. They live in demolition sites, under bridges, in the parks. The lucky ones find a meal and a bed in one of the four hostels for young people with nowhere else to go. Run by a group called Jesus People Inc., these hostels sheltered more than 1000 teenagers last year — and the numbers are climbing.

Jeff Hopp, director of Jesus People and chairman of the Western Australia Homeless Youth Project, says: "About five kids every day come to us, or are brought here by the police or sent from welfare agencies. Two-thirds of them are from interstate or New Zealand. Perth has become a mecca for kids with a problem. They still believe some myth about the golden west."

Jeff started the first hostel three years ago. At the time he was helping run a youth group coffee shop in the city. "When we closed on Friday and Saturday nights, a lot of kids had nowhere else to go. If you're old, or under 15, or have one eye or one leg there is a government department to help you. No one cared or realised that hundreds of kids had no home and no money."

Half the kids who come to the Jesus People are on hard drugs. Three-quarters have an alcohol problem. And 60 per cent of them come from broken homes.

What about girls? They don't get into such dire financial straits for one obvious reason: prostitution. Often it is not their intention when they leave home, but a gradual drift. Once they stop caring about tomorrow, they find no meaning at all in moral values. From accepting a meal from someone who has given them a lift, it is a relatively easy step to check into a hotel with him for a few dollars or even just the chance to sleep in a decent bed for one night.

Let's look at Lucy, 15, who left her home in Melbourne two years ago. The Perth police found her sleeping on a bench in the shopping centre one night two months ago took her to the Jesus People's girls' hostel. During the two months she was there, she told counsellors that she had been living as a prostitute for almost two years. She had hitched to Brisbane then on to Darwin and around the north-west coast, without money. But she quickly discovered her pretty little body was good collateral for a meal and a lift to the next town. She didn't see why this should change — what else was there?

A couple of mornings later, Lucy was gone. She was last seen on the road to Kalgoorlie, toting a canvas bag of clothes and waiting for a ride.

These cases don't reflect the true hopelessness of the young derelict. The ones who have given up absolutely don't come to hostels unless police bring them. Those who are running from a criminal prosecution, who are under school leaving age or who think their parents might have instigated a search for them, simply lie low. Registering for unemployment benefit means identifying themselves and supposedly giving an address, so they don't. Survival becomes a day-by-

day round of shoplifting food, avoiding contact with officialdom and finding a place to doss down for the night.

With no money and no one to turn to, Davey and Lucy are more likely to turn on someone, somewhere, with violence.

The question is then what does the future society of Australia hold for unemployed youth?

People such as clergymen, welfare workers, academics, businessmen and politicians believe they can see signs of a grim future in the coming decade.

In the words of one of these people, a clergyman: "Somebody fairly soon is going to organise and manipulate the unemployed. My guess is that he will lean to the Right."

"And to me that is frightening because the simplistic policies espoused by National front-type people are very seductive, especially to the down and out."

The words come from the Reverend John McCahon, of Bentleigh Uniting Church, and he is supported in his fear of Right-wing agitation by at least one other analyst, Dr Frank Knopfelmacher.

According to Dr Knopfelmacher, a political science commentator and lecturer, the emergence of the National Front in Australia last year presented a threat to social stability.

At the time of its formation he said there were many aspects of Australian life which could lead to upheaval if exploited successfully.

"Australia is no longer ethnically homogenous and tensions can easily erupt," he said.

"You have a lot of youth unemployment, you have a country population in a state of depression and ripe to be influenced by ultra-conservative organisations, and you have a tradition of racism in Australia — that is not an opinion, it is a statement of fact."

Nine months later he still sees the Front as a potential danger among unemployed people, but he says he doubts its philosophy will catch on as much as it has in England.

Mr McCahon is more definite in his fears.

He says: "People tend to laugh at National Front groups, but once it gets rolling it's hard to stop."

He predicts that "a Hitler-like character" will emerge within 10 years to organise the unemployed into urban guerilla units.

"We're going to get some guy who can throw words around flamboyantly and strike the right note."

Mr McCahon says the work of such a manipulator will be made easy by present policies of neglect towards the unemployed — particularly the young.

The Protestant work ethic will be threatened by young people who realise that work will never be a major part of their lives.

"Most societies tend to have a period of violence when they break loose from a mooring such as the work ethic," he says.

By the age of 25-30, permanently unemployed people will feel totally alienated from society. They will not have normal family relationships, they will have little material wealth and they will have no steady work to occupy their time.

"So they'll start to shake things up because they won't have anything to lose."

Mr McCahon is not the only clergyman to have fears for the future.

The Reverend H.R. Stephens, principal of Penleigh and Essendon Grammar, told a speech-night audience last year that Australia was rapidly turning into a nation of "haves" and "have-nots".

The price of failure in dealing with unemployment and economic problems could be the destruction of our society, he said.

"The growing frustration of the 'have-nots' could well lead to revolution before the 21st century," he said.

An Adelaide academic recently said on ABC radio that Australia's unemployed were in the same situation as those in pre-war Germany.

Dr Gordon McBride, of Flinders University, appeared to agree with Mr McCahon's views when he said extremist groups could influence jobless people who needed something to cling to.

He said religious, Right-wing and other extreme groups could all capitalise on the unemployed.

Dr McBride said a university study had found people who were unemployed for more than a year suffered great psychological stress.

"Naturally, the unemployed will be looking to groups that can offer them a way of looking at life that's more meaningful than that being offered by society at present," he said.

Ms Maureen Boaler, project officer for the Brotherhood of St Laurence, agrees that the frustrations of long-term unemployment could cause new divisions in Australia.

She says she can see a "bombshell" situation developing. "There must come a point when society says 'We've had enough of supporting that lot', and the unemployed say 'We've had enough of putting up with this'."

She believes young people have been "led up the garden path with promises of security".

"Obviously, as the length of unemployment continues to grow these people are going to feel alienated by society in general," she says.

"Young people pass through the education system and are made to believe they can get a job at the end of it.

"To make it worse, Government programmes are directed at the unemployed rather than their problem. They come out the other end to find there are still no jobs."

Ms Boaler says the strongest force working against political organisation is the possibility that employment officers will withdraw benefits from any person not spending all his or her time looking for work.

She says political extremism is a greater danger in countries like Italy, which has a history of political instability.

Senator Don Chipp, leader of the Australian Democrats, believes Australia should take note of the Italian experience with groups like the Red Brigades.

According to Senator Chipp, the Red Brigades are "incredibly active" among the unemployed in Italy.

He predicts that Australia will have one million unemployed by 1982 — greatly increasing the prospects for political action.

But he has trouble guessing whether successful agitation would come from the Left or Right.

"I can't see a communist trade union official organising the unemployed, because they are largely responsible for some part of the unemployment."

Similarly, he says Right-wingers would have trouble mobilising the jobless because Ring-wing policies have been largely responsible for their suffering.

But he says "the system has got to break down sooner or later."

Present Government monetarist policies are creating a "Catch 22" situation in which the economy is depressed and the Government is avoiding expenditure to stop a growing deficit. While the deficit is being cut, the economy is becoming more depressed. Thus unemployment is becoming more entrenched.

Senator Chipp describes the economic situation as a tragedy.

Ms Philippa Smith, policy analyst for the Australian Council of Social Service, believes current economic policies are helping to create "a political situation".

ACOSS, a group linking more than 2500 welfare organisations, has repeatedly warned of the dangers of neglecting the unemployed.

"Unemployment is certainly creating marked differences in society," Ms Smith says.

"The groups most at risk are being told they don't fit into society, being told they are dole-bludgers."

She says the unemployed are likely to be vulnerable to propaganda from extremist groups.

"If groups like that start giving them a feeling of purpose and identity they will start turning to them."

But while she concedes that unemployed people "may become aggressive", she does not see the same level of danger that exists overseas.

In the short term at least, Ms Smith says the unemployed are more likely to resort to crime and drug-taking.

The Community Welfare Services Minister, Mr Dixon, also believes the jobless will "drop out" rather than get involved in organised protest.

Mr Dixon, who is also chairman of the Victorian Employment Committee, says drug taking and lethargy are more immediate problems.

He describes many unemployed — not surprisingly — as "Life Be Out of It" people.

He sees political agitation as a "possible risk" in the future.

"I can understand people who are unemployed can be upset at the system," he says.

"Young people, by and large, should not feel guilty about being unemployed.

"We have got to make certain that family and community support systems are helping. We've got a lot more to do."

As yet, few people in the business world have voiced concern over the political implications of unemployment. Those who have spoken have been vague in their predictions.

For example a leading management consultant, Mr Malcolm Teague, warned late last year that Australia was sitting on a "time bomb of unemployment", he said the nation was due for enormous social dislocation unless welfare policies were better handled.

Is this the future scenario for Australia?

Is this the situation that you desire to happen?

I'll leave it to you to speculate.

In closing, let me say that a society that cannot find employment for its youth is a society that is condemned.

Australia cannot afford to let a whole generation simply resign.

The unemployed youth are waiting, patiently, waiting for change. The question is, for how much longer will they wait?

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