PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES[1]

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The term "precarious employment" has become part of the lexicon of academics, the media and a growing number of politicians at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. Almost daily we hear in the media of the frustration of workers unable to find decent paying, permanent employment and having to accept temporary positions with few benefits beyond a wage. This lack of employment stability affects young adults wanting to start their own families, immigrants hoping to start a new life in Canada, parents eager to see their children launch their own careers, and workers displaced from secure jobs and needing to start over. These frustrations are fueling a growing sense of public unease and a sense that something is wrong with a labour market that amply rewards a few, but leaves the majority of Canadians facing growing employment and income insecurity, low wages and uncertain career paths.

The spread of precarious employment in Canada and elsewhere is well documented by researchers (See Vosko 2006; 2010) as are its effects on the health of individual workers (See Quinlan and Bohle 2008; 2009; Underhill and Quinlan 2011; Vives et.al. 2013; Lewchuk, Clarke and de Wolff 2013). It is now linked to the emergence of a new underclass (Standing 2011). However, we are only beginning to fully understand the broader social implications of the spread of precarious employment and how it is reshaping households and communities (Carnoy 2000). The 2007 United Way Toronto (UWT) report, *Losing Ground: The Persistent Growth of Family Poverty in Canada's Largest City*, raised concerns about precarious employment's wider social effects. Under UWT leadership, a group of researchers and community and union activists began meeting in 2008 to develop a strategy to deepen our understanding of how the changing nature of Canadian labour markets was reshaping our communities. In 2010, this group was awarded an SSHRC Community University Research grant that led to the formation of the *Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario* (PEPSO) research project.

In February of 2013, PEPSO released a report titled *It's More than Poverty: Employment Precarity and Household Well-being*. The report, based on a population

survey of over 4,000 individuals and a series of extensive interviews with precariously employed workers in the Greater Toronto-Hamilton labour market, provides a detailed picture of the changing nature of Canadian urban labour markets and the impact this is having on households and communities. *It's More than Poverty* documented the retreat from permanent full-time employment that fueled the post 1945 boom in the Canadian economy and led to an unprecedented growth in the standard of living of working Canadians. Barely half of the participants in our study had full-time jobs that they expected to keep for at least the next 12 months and that paid some benefits. The report confirmed what others have argued: precarious employment is becoming the new norm for a growing class of Canadian workers.

It's More than Poverty not only documented the prevalence of precarious employment, but also the extent to which it has become the norm in sectors and amongst socio-economic groups that in the past were insulated from this type of employment. To be sure, recent immigrants and racialized minorities remain more likely to be precariously employed, but employment precarity is no longer the preserve mainly of women and of service workers (Hatton 2011). Workers employed across a wide range of economic sectors including those working in the media to those working in the knowledge economy, in education, in health care and in public sector jobs all face increased employment insecurity.

It's More than Poverty exposed how precarious employment can shape and limit important life decisions including partnership formation, where to live, housing, when to start a family, childcare options, recreation, and many other choices that can impact the quality of life and well-being of individuals and households. For example, compared to those in permanent full-time employment, the precariously employed were nearly three times as likely to delay having children due to their employment insecurity and were three times more likely to report difficulty finding appropriate childcare. Nearly half of the precariously employed reported that anxiety about their employment situation interfered with personal and family life.

The papers in this special section of *Just Labour* represent the next phase of work by the PEPSO research group. The papers draw on the survey data first examined in *It's More than Poverty* as well as other interview research by several of the research teams associated with PEPSO. They provide further evidence of how precarious employment is reshaping the society we live in.

Lewchuk, Lafleche, Dyson, Goldring, Meisner, Procyk, Rosen, Shields, Viducis and, Vrankulj ask if precarious employment is low income employment. They raise doubts about a simple association between the two. Low income employment is more likely to be precarious, but not all low income employment is precarious. Middle income employment is more likely to be secure but a surprising percentage of middle income employment has the characteristics of precarious employment including lack of control over work schedules,

uncertainty about future employment prospects and lack of supplementary benefits. They suggest this is evidence of the fundamental shift in Canadian labour markets and the need to refine our views of who is precariously employed and to assess the changing nature of permanent employment which is the foundation of the Standard Employment Relationship. They also find that while women continue to be paid significantly less than men, there are surprisingly small differences in the degree of employment precarity between men and women. However, non-white racialized workers continue to experience more employment precarity and lower income than whites (See Goldring and Joly; Premji et.al. in this volume).

Baines, Campey and Shields examine precarity within the nonprofit service providing sector (NPSS) where workers are themselves precariously employed while at the same time delivering essential services to the precariously employed. This allows both a deeper understanding of how precarity affects workers, but also provides a window into the broader community effects of precarity and how it is reshaping many parts of life. Insights drawn from on-going interview projects of NPSS providers in Toronto and data from the 2013 Ontario Nonprofit Network survey show the endemic nature of insecurity within organizations in this sector and how the various forms of insecurity reinforce each. At the same time, the insecurity within the NPSS sectors has impacts beyond the employment relationship for those seeking support from these organizations and reaches into the broader communities in which we live. They call for further explorations of these interactions.

Goldring and Joly take up the issue of race and precarity and extend the analysis to the question of citizenship. They enquire how the character of precarious work varies with citizenship status by comparing individuals who are Canadian-born, foreign-born citizens, and non-citizens, and how this status intersects with racialization and other factors to shape precarious employment. They find that employment precarity is disproportionately high for racialized non-citizens, and that becoming a citizen mitigates employment precarity. However, foreign birth and citizenship acquisition intersect with racialization in complex ways. Their findings stress the importance of citizenship status in shaping labour market outcomes and the potential beneficial effects of providing migrant workers better access to citizenship.

Premji, Shakya, Spasevski, Merolli and Athar also explore the issue of precarity, immigration and racism but in this case they focus on racialized immigrant women. Using peer researchers, they conducted interviews with 30 women in precarious employment. They find a significant mismatch between the education and experience these women bring to Canada and the employment they are able to find once in Canada. Racialized immigrant women face both structural barriers associated with labour markets themselves as well as barriers related to household gender relations. The negative labour market experiences of

these women affect their physical and mental health as well as that of their families. The authors call for new initiatives to promote improved employment opportunities for this group of workers (see Access Alliance 2014 for details).

Wells, McLaughlin, Lyn, and Mendiburo shift the focus of analysis to the impact of precarious employment on the families of migrant workers employed in Canada under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). Through interviews with family members in Mexico and Jamaica, they document the advantages for these families of having a member of the household working in Canada but also the social costs. An important observation is that the ability to work in Canada under the SAWP program only provides temporary relief for these families from the crush of poverty that is endemic in the regions in which they reside. This relief is precarious, as working in the SAWP does not provide new skills for workers that would allow them to succeed as workers where they live. The ending of SAWP employment often means a return to poverty for the affected families. The one potential long-term benefit is for the children of SAWP workers who enjoy a higher level of education as a result of remittances which creates a potential for enhanced employment prospects in the home regions. The long-term absence of spouses and parents under the program creates other costs for these families related to emotional and physical security issues.

Carson and Siemiatycki examine the successful campaign by cleaners from the City of Toronto to defend an attempt to have their work contracted out to private contractors. As city employees, the cleaners enjoy both a degree of security and a wage rate that supports a decent standard of living. Cleaners in the private sector face increased employment insecurity and significantly lower wages. The authors describe why this group of workers was successful in pushing back the neoliberal agenda of privatization. A combination of effective coalition building, a morally compelling campaign and fortuitous political alignments led to the success of the campaign. While it remains uncertain if this success will be permanent, the experience of the Toronto cleaners provides a model for other workers facing similar threats of contracting out and the erosion of their employment rights. The paper also points to the important role municipal governments can play in arresting the spread of precarious employment.

Together, these six papers provide a comprehensive investigation of the many impacts of precarious employment on individuals, families and communities. While some argue that any job is a good job, the studies in this volume show that precarious jobs come with significant individual and social costs making them less advantageous than permanent full-time employment. Precarity affects the health of individuals, creates tension within households and limits full participation in one's community. To be sure, precarity affects some groups of workers more than others, but as many of the papers in this volume argue, precarity is becoming more prevalent and is on its way to becoming the

new norm for employment relationships displacing the post-1945 norm of the Standard Employment Relationship. Dealing with this transition will challenge unions, policy makers and other social actors to re-evaluate their approaches to regulating labour markets to the benefit of workers.

The work of PEPSO is ongoing. A second population survey was conducted in the spring of 2014 and we anticipate releasing a companion report to *It's More than Poverty* in 2015. PEPSO researchers have also scanned the globe for policies and proposals designed to either reduce the prevalence of precarious employment or to mitigate its negative effects. Organized into 16 topic areas, this material is available at the PEPSO website (www.PEPSO.ca) and will provide the framework for the 2015 report. The research groups associated with PEPSO are also continuing their investigations of the association between precarity and social outcomes.

NOTES

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