The thesis revives the historical importance of a small, relatively obscure Australian workfare policy through a marxist theoretical framework that is equally marginal to Australian social policy analytics. The Jobs, Education and Training Program (JET) was a first-wave Active Society social welfare policy introduced by the Hawke Labor government in 1989. JET holds the peculiar distinction of being the only voluntary mass workfare program in Australian history. JET not only affected the lives of close to one million people, mainly single mothers and their children, but played a key role in fundamentally restructuring Australian welfare production. During the late 1990s state managers saw in the emotional and affective labour of JET workers an institutional opportunity to reconfigure frontline welfare labour processes into the neoliberal, 'customer service' model now adopted by Centrelink. How did JET, 'the best social justice policy Social Security ever had' turn into a compulsory mass workfare template for current state social reproduction policy?

This first historical appraisal of JET adopts what Perry Anderson has termed marxism's 'classical tradition' to ask: how might a marxist analysis of the Jobs, Education and Training program (1989-2006) explain its character and demise in the context of an historical critique of the Australian 'welfare reform agenda'? State social reproduction relations in economically advanced countries have become a crucial and growing aspect of the accumulation dynamics of national capitals. The thesis aligns with the progressive intent of those who argue that top-down and bottom-up policy implementation is in political tension, but replaces Lipsky’s liberal rendering of this tension with an historical materialist critique of policy production. In the interviews of JET workers and policy managers conducted for this research, a capacity to elicit the material and social underpinnings from what is being said comes through a particular application of the theoretical insights offered by the Bakhtin circle and Marx’s critique of capitalist ideology.

With the more explicit ideological acceptance of neoliberalism in the 1990s, welfare policies and state organisations were structured to more openly meet the social reproduction strategies of the period. The ‘strenuous welfarism’ of compulsory workfare for the majority of welfare recipients on one side of the Centrelink counter had its corollary on the other. The emotional and affective labour-readying work, once only conducted by JET Advisers, was added to the technical payment process activities of Centrelink frontline staff. The broadening of workfare...
During the four decades preceding the 1996 welfare reform, the number of participants on welfare had never significantly decreased. By 1995, nearly one in seven children was on AFDC. Yet within just a few years of TANF’s implementation, the caseload was cut in half, and employment rates and earnings among single mothers soared.[1]. The second part will describe the dramatic changes in the TANF work program that are planned by the Obama Administration. The Three Elements of Welfare Reform. The welfare reform enacted in 1996 had three main elements. First, the reform changed the funding structure. The old AFDC program had an entitlement funding system. If caseloads went up, state governments received more federal funds.

Copyright © 2014 RMIT University | Disclaimer | Privacy | Accessibility | Website feedback
ABN 49 781 030 034 CRICOS provider number: 00122A

© 2014 RMIT Research Repository • Powered by Fire Software • Contact us