

# IMPROVING THE ECONOMIC SECURITY OF CASUAL WORKERS IN BC



By Fiona MacPhail  
and Paul Bowles



AUGUST 2008



CCPA  
CANADIAN CENTRE  
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
BC Office

AN ECONOMIC SECURITY PROJECT REPORT

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# Summary

Many have been puzzling over a paradox that currently marks the BC economy: Why have years of low unemployment and solid economic growth failed to translate into improved economic security for those in the lower tiers of the labour market? The reasons are multiple and complex, but public policy choices have surely played a role. This research project provides one piece of the puzzle. It examines the trends and experiences of people engaged in casual work in BC, and looks at the policy choices that have led to both an increase in the share of casual work in the province, and to deterioration in the economic security casual workers are able to derive from the labour market. The study makes policy recommendations aimed at improving the economic security of casual workers.

Casual workers are defined as employees who work without a contract or who have a contract of short duration (defined as six months or less). The project uses data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey from 1997 to 2007, and a survey of casual workers undertaken by the authors in Vancouver and Prince George in 2005.

## Key Findings

- The number of casual workers in BC increased by about 59,000 between 1997 and 2007. The incidence of casual work increased from 10.2 to 12.3 per cent for women and from 9.4 to 10.1 per cent for men.
- Casual work is gendered and racialized: women are more likely to be casual workers than men, and non-Canadian-born respondents reported lower levels of basic security than Canadian-born respondents, including difficulty accessing food, housing and health care.
- Our survey challenges the view that most casual workers are such by choice. About 80 per cent of respondents said they are actively seeking permanent work.
- Casual workers experience a high degree of economic insecurity with respect to income, skills, employment, representation, and control of their time.
- Casual workers have been negatively affected by specific policy changes introduced in BC from 2001 onwards. For example, changes to the Employment Standards Act include the reduction of the minimum wage to \$6 for the first 500 hours of employment while changes to the Labour Relations Code have made it more difficult to obtain union representation.
- Recent neo-liberal policies in BC have contributed to the rise in casual work. These policies include: privatization/contracting-out, welfare reform, de/re-regulation of the labour market, and roll-backs to employment standards. Notably, despite buoyant economic conditions and falling unemployment rates, the percentage of temporary workers has not decreased accordingly. The data point to a striking “BC policy effect”—even when controlling for broad economic conditions, the likelihood of being a casual worker in BC has grown since 2001 to a much greater extent than in other provinces (including in Ontario, which had introduced similar but less drastic labour reforms).

The overwhelming picture that emerges from our survey is of the double bind in which financial and time constraints affect all aspects of casual workers’ lives and their ability to balance work and family obligations. There is a constant need for more income, yet this is continually undermined by irregular hours, shift work, short call-ins, minimal notice of work schedules, and low pay. Recent public policy choices have exacerbated this tension.

BC is promoted as “the best place to invest,” but if it is also going to be the “best place to work”—where working people experience economic security—new policies must be introduced. This paper makes recommendations in three areas: improving the economic security of casual workers; facilitating the transition from casual to permanent work; and improving the economic security of all workers.

Policies to improve the economic security of casual workers include:

- **INCOME:** Increase the minimum wage and index it to inflation. Increase access to non-wage benefits (such as health and dental benefits).
- **EMPLOYMENT:** Expand coverage of the Employment Standards Act (ESA) to include all unionized workers, independent contractors, and workers in all occupations—including agricultural workers and truck drivers.
- **REPRESENTATION:** Remove barriers to union membership and reverse the exclusion of unionized workers from the ESA. Strengthen enforcement of the ESA.
- **TIME SECURITY:** Reverse changes made to the ESA such as the reduction of the minimum call-in period (from four to two hours), and improve regulations around overtime, working conditions, pay, and termination notice.

Policies to facilitate the transition from casual to permanent work include:

- Improve access to education and training, and provide forms of income support to enable individuals to take advantage of those opportunities.
- Provide incentives and requirements for employers to make permanent positions for casual workers (along the lines of those in Australia and the European Union).

Policies to improve the economic security of all workers include:

- Expand eligibility to “care” entitlements (e.g. parental leave through Employment Insurance) and health and dental benefits beyond the permanent, full-time worker.
- Provide universal publicly-funded child care.

# Introduction

Low unemployment rates and high job creation no longer signal economic security for many workers. The unemployment rate in BC in 2007 was 4.2 per cent, the lowest rate in 30 years and better than the national average of 6.3 per cent. The number of employed people in BC has risen by about 335,000 between 1997 and 2006.<sup>1</sup> We argue that today, however, low and declining unemployment rates co-exist with high and rising economic insecurity.

Other research has shown that income inequality in Canada has increased,<sup>2</sup> even though the economy is enjoying the best of times—times, when based on past experience, income inequality would be expected to fall. This paper points to similar experiences in BC—provincial economic conditions are such that we would expect to see a fall in the percentage of casual workers, but the opposite is occurring. When unemployment is low, we would expect workers to find it easier to find permanent jobs and firms keener to offer permanent employment as a way of retaining scarce labour. In BC, however, we find that casual work has increased. Furthermore, the economic security of many workers in casual jobs is falling as well. This outcome is partly attributable to the labour policy changes brought in by the provincial government since 2001.

Economic insecurity is felt by many workers whether they hold permanent or casual jobs. In many ways, however, it is casual workers who experience the greatest economic insecurity. Casual workers are those who hold jobs with a short-term contract or with no contract at all; whereas, workers with permanent jobs have employment that is expected to be ongoing or have a contract of indefinite duration. Casual work, compared with permanent work, is more likely to be associated with low wages, no benefits, and reduced access to the protections of standard employment rights and benefits. In this study, we focus on casual workers: what has

been happening to their number, to their experiences, and how government policies have affected them. We argue that the new policy challenge for BC is to reverse the deteriorating levels of economic security experienced by the increasing number of casual workers.

In Section 2, we document the prevalence of casual work in the BC economy and examine how casual workers experience economic security, drawing upon the economic security concepts developed by Guy Standing and the International Labour Organization. We utilize data from the Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey, as well as a survey we conducted in Prince George and Vancouver in 2005. We demonstrate that casual workers are more likely to experience greater economic insecurity than other workers, and are more likely to be women, young people, and immigrants.

In Section 3, we demonstrate that government policies enacted in BC have negatively affected the economic security of workers in BC by eroding the conditions of casual workers, making it more difficult for workers to make the transition from casual to permanent work, and by creating the conditions, directly and indirectly, conducive to an increase in the number of casual workers. This analysis confirms the importance of government policy in affecting casual work, a conclusion that leads us to search for policy alternatives.

While BC is promoted as “the best place to invest,” if it is also going to be the “best place to work” – where working people experience economic security – new policies must be introduced. Such solutions and alternatives are discussed in Section 4. The main results and conclusion are provided in Section 5.



# Casual Work and Economic Security in BC

## What is Casual Work?

There is no standard definition of “casual work.” A variety of terms are used in the literature, such as “temporary,” “contingent,” “precarious,” “non-traditional,” or “non-standard” work, to capture the idea that casual jobs are different from the full-time, permanent, and more secure type of job.

For this study, we define casual work as work undertaken for an employer that has no guarantee of being extended beyond a specified period, which may be as short as one day or as long as six months. This definition captures the idea that the job is of short duration and is insecure because the worker cannot expect the job to continue. This definition, with the six-month maximum contract length, is used by Statistics Canada to define temporary work and it is used in the remainder of this report.

To obtain information on the meaning of casual work and experience of casual workers, we undertook a survey of casual workers in Prince George and Vancouver in 2005. The survey includes responses from 160 casual workers who come from the lower-paying end of the casual work pool, rather than the highly-paid consultants who might work on contract. Details of the survey and the distribution of respondents in terms of gender, location, and immigration status are presented in Appendix A. The survey was made possible through the assistance of a number of community organizations that made the survey known to casual workers and helped in the interview process.

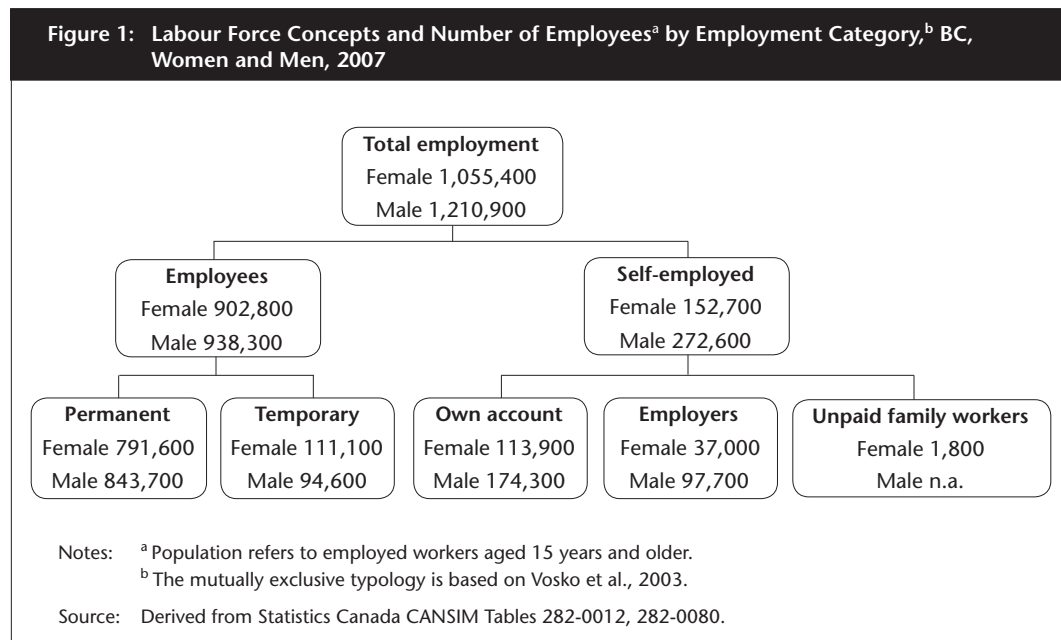
Based on the survey results, it is clear that the contractual status of casual workers varies considerably. Not only are some workers employed without contracts while others have them, but there are large differences in, for example, notice of call-in (the amount of time given to workers before the start of their shift), regularity of hours, length of the minimum working period, whether workers can be sent home during their shift if there is insufficient work, length of notice that is given for employment termination, and whether workers receive preferential treatment (based on seniority) for either casual or permanent future employment.

In our survey, some of the characteristics of casual work and the differences within the group are:

- The length of notice given for the start of work varied from 15 minutes to two months (with 60 per cent reporting they were given one day or less notice);
- The minimum length of the shift reported was 30 minutes (which is in violation of the Employment Standards Act);
- Employees received between zero and two weeks' notice of job termination (with 40 per cent receiving zero notice of termination);
- 30 per cent were sent home if there was insufficient work; and
- 50 per cent had no preferential access to permanent jobs, while 50 per cent did receive some preferential access.

## Number of Casual Workers in BC

To measure the number of casual workers and the percentage of casual workers, we distinguish between a number of mutually exclusive labour force and employment categories, following the typology used by Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford (2003) and shown in Figure 1. If people



are in the labour force, they are classified as employed or unemployed. Among the employed, workers are then either in paid employment or self-employment. Paid employment is further sub-divided into permanent work and temporary work.

The most narrow definition of casual work is one defined solely in terms of workers with temporary contracts. Very broad definitions of casual work would include not only workers on temporary contracts, but also workers with permanent contracts but with part-time hours, as well as self-employed, own-account workers.<sup>3</sup>

As shown in Table 1, the numbers and incidence of casual work depend upon the exact definition of casual work used. The incidence of casual work in BC, among women, is 12 per cent for the most narrow definition, which refers to paid jobs with temporary contracts. The incidence of casual workers increases to 21 per cent if self-employed, own-account workers are included, and increases to 25 per cent if all self-employed workers are included. For men, the estimate of the incidence of casual work ranges from 10 to 30 per cent. In the remainder of the report, we use the most narrow definition of casual work, that is a paid, temporary job. Using this narrow definition of casual work, as temporary work, in the province of BC in 2007, there were 111,100 female casual workers and 94,600 male casual workers. This conservative estimate would be greatly increased if workers with permanent but part-time jobs and self-employed, own-account workers were included.

Provincial economic conditions are such that we would expect to see a fall in the percentage of casual workers, but the opposite is occurring. When unemployment is low, we would expect workers to find it easier to find permanent jobs and firms keener to offer permanent employment as a way of retaining scarce labour. In BC, however, we find that casual work has increased.

**Table 1: Definitions and Estimates of “Casual Work” in BC, 2007**

Workers with paid jobs – temporary contracts	# Self-employed workers			Total casual (#)	Total employees <sup>a</sup> (#)	Total employed <sup>b</sup> (#)	Casual <sup>c</sup> (%)
	Own account	Employers	Unpaid family workers				
<b>Women</b>							
111,100				111,100	902,800		12.3
111,100	113,900			225,000		1,055,400	21.3
111,100	113,900	37,000		262,000		1,055,400	24.8
111,100	113,900	37,000	1,800	263,000		1,055,400	24.9
<b>Men</b>							
94,600				94,600	938,300		10.1
94,600	174,300			268,900		1,210,900	22.2
94,600	174,300	97,700		366,600		1,210,900	30.3
94,600	174,300	97,700	n.a.	366,600		1,210,900	30.3
Notes: <sup>a</sup> “Total employees” refers to people with paid jobs and temporary contracts plus people with paid jobs and permanent contracts.							
<sup>b</sup> “Total employed” refers to total employees plus total self-employed.							
<sup>c</sup> Covers employed workers aged 15 years and older.							
Source: Derived from Statistics Canada CANSIM Tables 282-0012, 282-0080.							

## Defining Economic Security

A comprehensive set of measures of economic security is provided by the International Labour Organization<sup>4</sup> and numerous publications by Guy Standing.<sup>5</sup> We outline below seven dimensions of work-related economic security. These dimensions are taken directly from Standing,<sup>6</sup> although we have slightly modified the definitions, combined two of the ILO categories, added a new form of economic security called time security, and delineated the main mechanism through which that form of economic security is obtained in BC. The economic security dimensions are as follows.

- **LABOUR MARKET SECURITY:** Opportunities to participate in the labour market; primarily created through macroeconomic policy, but also the distribution of employment between the private and public sectors.
- **JOB SECURITY:** Protection against arbitrary dismissal, access to standard employment rights and benefits; primarily ensured through employment standards legislation and unions.
- **HEALTH AND SAFETY SECURITY (AT WORK):** Protection against illnesses and accidents in the workplace; primarily ensured through provincial legislation, WorkSafe BC, unions, and the incentives provided to employers to provide healthy and safe workplaces.
- **SKILL SECURITY:** Opportunities to gain and retain skills; primarily ensured through accessible vocational training, apprenticeships, and post-secondary education.
- **INCOME SECURITY:** Sufficient money income and social income; primarily ensured through minimum wages, Employment Insurance, private and public pension programs, social assistance, and non-income services such as health care.
- **REPRESENTATION SECURITY:** Protection of collective voice in the labour market; primarily obtained through unions, but also other bodies and organizations that represent the interests of workers, including employment standards enforcement.
- **TIME SECURITY:**<sup>7</sup> Control over working time, both the total amounts and scheduling of work, including notice for work, minimum call-in periods, limits on overtime and length of contracts; primarily obtained through unions, employment standards, and norms. Time security is vital for helping people balance home and work responsibilities.

How people fare in terms of these dimensions of economic security depends on the type of jobs they hold and the policy context. We use these economic security dimensions below to analyze the situation of casual workers in BC.

## Relationship Between Casual Work and Economic Security

Our survey of casual workers sheds light on the relationship between casual workers and economic security (details of the survey are provided in Appendix A). It should be noted that approximately 80 per cent of the people in the survey can be regarded as actively seeking permanent work, since they indicated they were in casual work either because they could not find a permanent job, or hoped that their casual work would turn into a permanent job.<sup>8</sup> Of the remaining 20 per cent, just over half were constrained by domestic responsibilities in the form of caring for children and/or relatives or had health problems themselves. While these workers might be seen as being voluntarily in casual work, the more important point is that it is the nature of the constraints they face in providing care that make permanent work impossible. Somewhat less than 10 per cent of the sample can be described as voluntary casual workers, where men especially wanted casual work to see if they liked the job and women wanted casual work as an income supplement, but did not want permanent attachment to the labour market.

The nature of economic security among casual workers is analyzed below using the seven dimensions and the results of our survey.<sup>9</sup>

### 1. Labour Market Security

Casual workers in BC have low labour market security and it is decreasing. We had expected that improvements in the economy would be associated with increased opportunities in the labour market, measured by a rise in permanent, secure jobs and a decline in temporary, insecure jobs.<sup>10</sup> However, in BC, the improvements in the economy, proxied by the unemployment rate, are not associated with a decline in the percentage of temporary workers. As shown in Figure 2 on page 14, the decline in the unemployment rate in the late 1990s was associated with a rise, not fall, in the percentage of temporary workers for both men and women. Further, while the unemployment rate was lower in 2007, compared to 1997, the percentage of temporary workers was higher.

### 2. Job Security

Casual workers have little job security. As already noted above in the discussion of the meaning of a casual job, many of the casual workers surveyed do not have employment contracts and 60 per cent reported they received one day or less notice of job termination. It is unlikely these workers would be able to access any mechanism to challenge an unfair dismissal or seek compensation.

Job security is difficult to empirically assess. However, a question regarding workers' own perceptions about job security provides some sense of this dimension. About 62 per cent of women

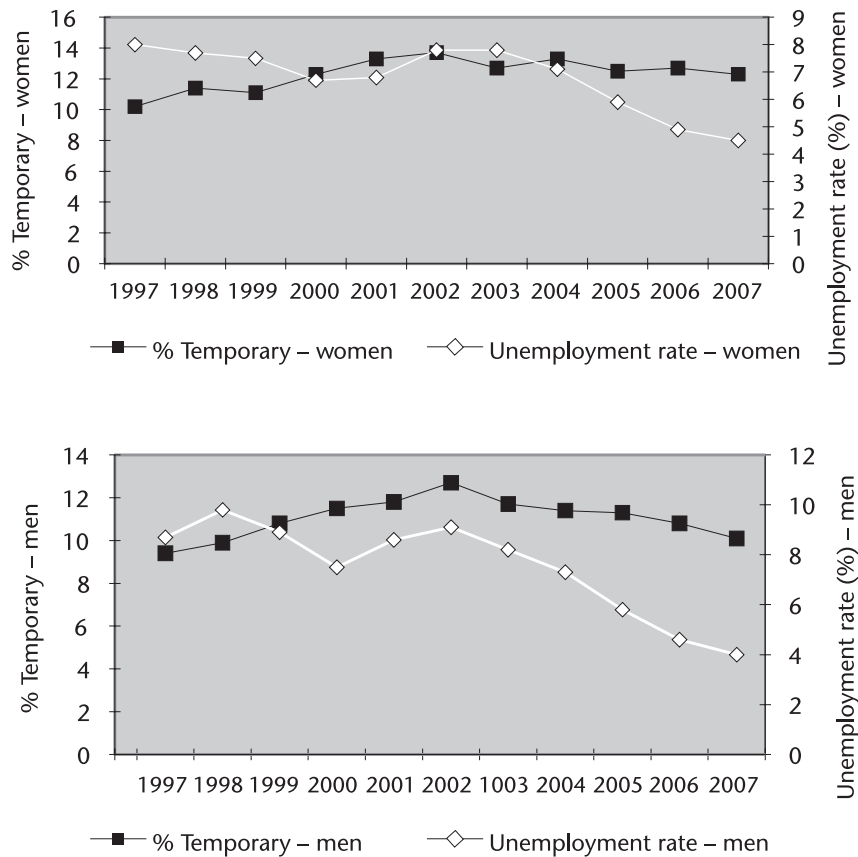
Eighty per cent of the people in the survey can be regarded as actively seeking permanent work, since they indicated they were in casual work either because they could not find a permanent job, or hoped that their casual work would turn into a permanent job.

and 54 per cent of men reported they were dissatisfied (or very dissatisfied) with their level of job security (see Table 2 on page 15).

### 3. Health and Safety Security (at Work)

Casual workers experience poor working conditions. About one quarter of the female respondents in our survey reported experiencing stress arising from work and about 13 per cent of male respondents reported stress related to the workplace. The workplace is also considered to be unsafe by 20 per cent of men and 14 per cent of women. Workers reported incurring injuries on the job, including broken ribs and a punctured lung (a landscape handyman). Workers also reported being fearful of injuries arising from the unsafe storage of pallets (in the case of a truck driver), poor ventilation (worker in a call centre), and fear of violent attack (a security guard). Another respondent who works as a cleaner noted there were no changes in the organization of work despite her repeated injuries on the job.

Figure 2: Temporary Employees and the Unemployment Rate, BC, Women and Men, 1997–2007



Note: Estimated for the population aged 15 years and older.

Source: Percentage of temporary employees derived from Statistics Canada CANSIM Table 282-0080; unemployment rate derived from CANSIM Table 282-0002.

## 4. Skill Security

There is also widespread skill insecurity among casual workers. Skill security, according to the ILO, refers to “a wide range of opportunities for training, apprenticeship and education to acquire and refine knowledge and competencies.”<sup>11</sup> Components of skill security include access to schooling, access to training, utilization of training, perceived adequacy of skills, and perceived need for training.<sup>12</sup> From our casual worker survey, 69 per cent of women, and 61 per cent of men reported it is likely they would need to acquire new skills. This is a relatively high percentage of workers perceiving inadequacy of skills, especially given that among women, 65 per cent have more than a Grade 12 education, and among men about 50 per cent have more than a Grade 12 education. The perceived inadequacy of skills may be related, however, to the finding that these workers are not actually using their skills in their current casual work positions. Many casual workers have plans or desires to upgrade their skills; for example, respondents reported having plans to take courses in surveying, counseling, advanced computing, as well as in English to upgrade language skills.

Despite the majority of respondents having plans or desires to upgrade their skills, there is also widespread concern about access to training programs. Barriers to obtaining additional training are widespread given that 85 per cent of women and 60 per cent of men reported large obstacles to acquiring new skills.

## 5. Income Security

Not surprisingly, casual workers have little income security. Although the weekly wage rate is only one component of income, we can still derive a sense of the level of income by examining wages. In 2007, the median weekly wage for male temporary workers was \$500, compared to \$869 for permanent employees (or 58 per cent). The median weekly wage for female temporary workers was \$367, compared to \$600 for permanent workers (or 61 per cent).<sup>13</sup>

**Table 2: Satisfaction Levels With Current Job (Percentage of Casual Workers)**

	Wage level	Benefits	Nature of work performed	Extent of autonomy on the job	Opportunity for improving skills	Job security
<b>Men</b>						
Very satisfied	9.8	0	31.1	23.0	14.8	4.9
Satisfied	37.7	14.8	37.7	32.8	23.0	23.0
Neutral	9.8	29.5	21.3	26.2	34.4	18.0
Dissatisfied	24.6	11.5	1.6	9.8	9.8	32.8
Very dissatisfied	18.0	41.0	8.2	6.6	16.7	21.3
<b>Women</b>						
Very satisfied	6.1	2.0	20.0	11.0	11.0	1.0
Satisfied	38.4	11.0	36.0	32.0	25.3	16.0
Neutral	15.2	18.0	20.0	25.0	27.3	22.0
Dissatisfied	33.3	25.0	20.0	21.0	21.2	35.0
Very dissatisfied	7.1	44.0	4.0	11.0	15.2	26.0

Source: Casual worker survey conducted for this report in 2005.

In the survey, we also asked questions about access to food and housing (basic security) to gauge income security. Almost 25 per cent of men and 18 per cent of women reported insufficient access to food, thus basic security and income security for casual workers is clearly an issue of concern (see Table 3). Non-Canadian-born respondents reported lower levels of basic security than Canadian-born respondents across all categories. Housing security was higher in Prince George than in Vancouver (for example, 30 per cent of women in Prince George reported that income was “more than sufficient” to meet housing needs, compared to only 10 per cent in Vancouver).

Based on our survey, a high percentage of casual workers are concerned about income instability. Specifically, over 80 per cent of men and 90 per cent of women reported being “very worried”

or “somewhat worried” about the instability of their incomes. This information is likely a more reliable estimate of income insecurity than actual estimates of annual income from our survey (not reported here) given that the irregularity of income and the multiplicity of its sources make attempts to measure average income (over any period) problematic.

Added to the concept of money income is the idea of social income, which includes firm benefits and state benefits, such as universal rights-based benefits and targeted benefits, as well as family transfers.<sup>14</sup> From the survey, only 15 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women were satisfied or very satisfied with the level of firm-provided benefits, such as dental and extended health (see Table 2 on page 15). Many of the casual workers did not even qualify for standard working benefits such as statutory

holiday pay. Striking is the degree of dissatisfaction with benefits, including statutory benefits. Further questions on this revealed that less than 5 per cent of workers in the sample received severance pay, child care leave, parental leave, or paid sick leave. Only about one third of casual workers received statutory holiday pay, a quarter received pension contributions and about half received vacation pay.

Less than 5 per cent of workers in the sample received severance pay, child care leave, parental leave, or paid sick leave. Only about one third of casual workers received statutory holiday pay, a quarter received pension contributions and about half received vacation pay.

	Food	Housing	Health	Clothing	Education	Recreation
<b>Men</b>						
More than sufficient	29.5	16.7	20.0	16.4	1.7	11.5
Just enough	45.9	60.0	50.9	50.8	35.6	36.1
Less than sufficient	24.6	23.3	29.1	32.8	62.7	52.5
<b>Women</b>						
More than sufficient	24.8	15.3	13.3	10.9	3.1	9.0
Just enough	57.6	56.1	45.9	40.6	27.6	29.0
Less than sufficient	17.8	28.6	40.8	48.5	69.4	62.0

Source: Casual worker survey conducted for this report in 2005.



## 6. Representation Security

The survey results presented in Table 4 show some dissatisfaction with the degree of protection offered by the current institutional framework, which includes both unions and provincial legislation. For example, 26 per cent men expressed dissatisfaction (sum of dissatisfied and very dissatisfied) with the degree of protection, while 31 per cent of women expressed dissatisfaction. It should be noted that when casual workers were covered by a collective agreement, the percentage of workers dissatisfied with the degree of protection was smaller than for the group of casual workers as a whole.

We also asked respondents about their attitudes towards unions. The results are presented in Table 5. Attitudes towards trade unions are overwhelmingly positive or mixed, suggesting that unions remain a critical vehicle for representational security. For non-Canadian-born men, unions are viewed very positively; notably, there are no men in the mostly negative cell in Table 5 for non-Canadian-born men.

**Table 4: Satisfaction with Interests being Protected in the Workplace (Percentage of Casual Workers)**

	Men				Women			
	All	Canadian-born	Non-Canadian-born	Covered by a collective agreement	All	Canadian-born	Non-Canadian-born	Covered by a collective agreement
Very satisfied	6.6	11.1	0	6.7	6.9	6.7	7.5	4.9
Satisfied	31.1	41.7	17.4	46.7	37.6	35.0	40.0	39.0
Neutral	32.8	19.4	56.5	20.0	24.8	28.3	20.0	36.6
Dissatisfied	21.3	22.2	21.7	26.7	20.8	26.7	12.5	12.2
Very dissatisfied	4.9	5.6	4.3	0.0	9.9	3.3	20.0	7.3

Source: Casual worker survey conducted for this report in 2005.

**Table 5: Attitudes Toward Trade Unions (Percentage of Casual Workers)**

	Men			Women		
	All	Canadian-born	Non-Canadian-born	All	Canadian-born	Non-Canadian-born
Mostly positive	38.9	31.4	52.6	38.7	39.3	36.1
Mixed	46.3	45.7	47.4	52.7	51.8	55.6
Mostly negative	14.8	22.9	0	8.6	8.9	8.3

Source: Casual worker survey conducted for this report in 2005.

## 7. Time Security

The lack of time security was a major concern for casual workers in our survey, with implications for them and their families. Some of the quotations below, taken from our survey, reveal the problems:

- *There is no guarantee I can attend family functions; I have mostly evening and weekend shifts.*
- *I cannot plan a vacation.*
- *I often have to work late or very early hours. I am always tired and irritable. I seldom have the money to participate in family outings.*
- *It's difficult to spend time with my daughter and fiancée because I am on call.*
- *Feeling insecure makes me more irritable.*
- *I often must just leave abruptly at meals or events.*
- *I cannot plan activities with my kids.*
- *I don't get to see family and friends because of long hours and never know when I get off.*
- *I go to bed early in case I get an early call; plans are always tentative.*
- *I find myself stretched very thin so when I do find time, I don't enjoy it much.*
- *I have to cancel plans last minute to run to work if I get called.*
- *I am single but it still affects social life and relationships since you cannot plan ahead your weekend.*
- *I have missed many family events. There is a lot of stress and tension.*
- *I constantly have to move my kids to different caregivers.*

These quotations illustrate the problems casual workers face as a result of what we can call “time insecurity.” Of course, it interacts with income insecurity, since workers feel unable to turn down inconvenient hours. Permanent employees, especially shift workers, may also experience family stresses, but the uncertainty of hours for casual workers adds an extra layer.

The overwhelming picture that emerged from the qualitative part of the survey was the double bind in which many casual workers find themselves—that is, financial and time constraints that affect all aspects of their lives and interactions with families and friends. This is especially the case for casual workers with children, but extends to many others as well. There is a constant need for income, but at the same time the irregular hours, shift work, uncertainty of being called in at short notice, and the juggling of more than one job places enormous strains on family and other relationships and prevents leading a “normal” social life. And yet, the only way to increase control over social life is to limit casual work, an option that is not practical because of the income imperative for most casual workers.

Having established the nature of economic insecurity experienced by casual workers in BC, we now turn to examine how government policy has affected casual workers.

# Government Policy Changes Affecting Casual Workers

The provincial election in 2001 led to radical and comprehensive changes in the policy environment in British Columbia, shifting the economy toward a more “flexible” labour regime, primarily to the benefit of employers. Many of the policy changes have shifted the balance of bargaining power to employers, and thereby, have reduced economic security (see *Key Policy Changes Since 2001 Reducing Economic Security of Casual Workers* on page 20 for a summary of the policy changes). More specifically, the policies potentially reduce economic security by:

- Eroding the conditions of casual work;
- Making it more difficult for casual workers to make the transition to permanent work; and
- Creating the conditions, directly and indirectly, conducive to an increase in the number (and percentage) of casual workers.

The links between policies and each of these three impacts are discussed below.

## **Key Policy Changes Since 2001 Reducing Economic Security of Casual Workers**

### **Policies reducing economic security of casual workers**

Employment Standards Act changes:

- More occupations excluded from coverage under the Employment Standards Act (e.g. long-haul truck drivers, agricultural workers);
- Unionized workers excluded from coverage under the Employment Standards Act;
- Minimum call-in period for employees reduced from four to two hours;
- Complicated “overtime averaging” rules mean workers may feel pressured to agree to 12 hour days for seven straight days;
- First-job minimum wage lowered the minimum wage for the first 500 hours of employment from \$8 per hour to \$6 per hour;
- Increased difficulty qualifying for statutory holidays; and
- Employers no longer required to post employment standards and work schedules in the workplace.

Employment Standards Act enforcement:

- Enforcement changed from routine inspection to complaint-driven system, with “self-help kits” and no requirement to investigate complaints; and
- Closure of 50 per cent of BC employment standards offices.

Labour Relations Code:

- Harder to obtain union representation; and
- Easier to decertify unions.

### **Policies making the transition from casual to permanent work more difficult**

Education and training:

- Post-secondary tuition increased 76 per cent over four years (2001–2004);
- Elimination of the Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission and replacement with Industry Training Authority with greater emphasis on “designer” skills and user pay;
- Cuts to employment bridging programs; and
- Closure of elementary and high schools (plus loss of specialized facilities and services).

Social assistance:

- Elimination of income assistance for full-time post-secondary students.

### **Policies increasing supply of casual workers**

#### Social assistance:

- Overall, access to social assistance made more complicated and restrictive, with 30 per cent budget cut to ministry responsible for social assistance;
- Cuts to social assistance benefits;
- Elimination of family maintenance exemption;
- Single parent with child required to work when child reaches three years (down from seven years);
- Eligibility requires two years of “financial independence”;
- Employment plan required to receive benefits;
- Three-week waiting period for benefit claimants; and
- Penalties for quitting a job or being fired with cause.

#### Other supporting programs:

- Elimination of Ministry of Women’s Equality, BC Human Rights Commission;
- Cuts to legal aid services (family law legal aid restricted to situations of violence, poverty law legal aid eliminated);
- Reductions in availability of hospital and long-term care beds;
- Cuts to home care services;
- Cuts to community-based victims’ services programs; and
- Elimination of core funding for women’s centres.

### **Policies increasing the demand for casual workers**

- Privatization of Crown corporations (BC Rail, part of BC Hydro, BC Ferries); and
- Privatization of health support services in hospitals and care facilities (laundry, food preparation, cleaning) – 9,000 Hospital Employees’ Union jobs contracted out.

Source: Compiled from Cohen (2005); Creese and Strong-Boag (2005); Drevland (2004); Fairey (2005); Fairey and MacDonald (2001); Fuller and Stephens (2004); Klein and Long (2003); Wallace, Klein and Reitsma-Street (2006).

## Eroding the Conditions of Casual Work

Government policies have reduced the economic security of workers currently employed in casual jobs in several ways. Time security is reduced as a result of the minimum call-in period being reduced from four to two hours, and employers being no longer required to post employment standards in the workplace or to give 24 hours' notice of a shift change. The survey provides information on whether casual workers were affected by specific policy changes (see Table 6). About one quarter of male casual workers and 29 per cent of female casual workers were affected by the reduction in the call-in period; about 15 per cent of men and 9 per cent of women were affected by the reduced coverage of the Employment Standards Act (ESA). With respect to the reduction in the call-in period, casual workers responded with statements such as:

- *My employer doesn't follow any regulations. I'm often sent home without pay or work extra without pay. I can't complain because then I wouldn't have a job after.*
- *The call-in time really affects me since I'm on call with the other job, even if only for two hours, I can't say no.*
- *If there are only two-hour shifts and I have to pay for the bus both ways, it's not worth it.*

Income security can be affected through policy changes that affect wages, hours, and/or receipt of benefits. Reduction of the call-in period affects hours. In terms of the \$6 first job minimum wage, about 8 per cent of men and 9 per cent of women reported being affected by this lowering of the minimum wage.

Representation security of casual workers is likely to have been reduced through changes in the provincial labour regime. Specifically, enforcement of the Employment Standards Act was weakened by a change in the method of enforcement from routine inspection to a complaint-driven system (with use of "self-help" kits), with no requirement to investigate complaints, and the closure of half of the employment standards offices across the province.<sup>15</sup> Further, there is a reduced likelihood of casual workers obtaining representation security through unions given changes to the Labour Relations Code that made it harder to obtain union representation and easier to decertify unions.

Policy Change	Men	Women
Reduction in call-in period from four to two hours	24.6	28.7
Changes to overtime averaging rule	19.7	9.9
Reduced coverage of the Employment Standards Act	14.8	8.9
Two-year time limit	18.0	23.8
School closures	1.6	17.8
Increased post-secondary tuition fees	24.6	42.6
Health care and hospital access changes	19.7	30.7
Introduction of lower first job minimum wage	8.2	8.9

Source: Casual worker survey conducted for this report in 2005.

## Greater Difficulty Transitioning to Permanent Work

Government policies enacted after 2001 have also made it more difficult for people in casual work to move to permanent employment. The 76 per cent increase in post-secondary tuition makes it more difficult for workers to obtain post-secondary education. Other reforms have made training less accessible. Examples include the elimination of the Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission, elimination of innovative youth training and employment programs, cuts to employment bridging programs, cuts to Job Start and Skills for Employment, a reduction in funding to non-profit organizations providing training and English as a second language, and cuts to high-school completion programs at community colleges.<sup>16</sup> About 25 per cent of male casual workers and 43 per cent of female casual workers in our survey reported being negatively affected by increased education costs. About 61 per cent of men and 69 per cent of women reported having insufficient access to education and training.

The following comments from the survey respondents indicate the impact of education costs:

- *I was saving to go back to school, but with tuition hikes, I'll have to save for three more years.*
- *Welfare hasn't helped me find employment. I feel intimidated by them.*
- *For the four years I've been in Canada, I've been in school, first for language training, then for vocational training with my husband. Our wages are low and we both need re-training, but it is very expensive.*

Child care became less accessible to parents and hence makes moving into permanent work more difficult. Child care subsidies were cut in 2002, and then restored in 2004. However, in the ensuing years, the number of subsidized child care spaces dropped.<sup>17</sup> The lack of spaces and increasing fees is a challenge for all parents of young children, but especially for casual workers with irregular hours.

Time security is reduced as a result of the minimum call-in period being reduced from four to two hours, and employers being no longer required to post employment standards in the workplace or to give 24 hours' notice of a shift change.

## Policies That Increase Casual Employment<sup>18</sup>

BC policies enacted since 2001 may have contributed to the rise in the number of casual workers.

First, changes to the Employment Standards Act have made it easier for employers to hire workers on a casual, rather than permanent basis. The definitions of certain occupations were changed and, as a result, there was an increase in the number of occupations excluded from provisions of the Employment Standards Act. As BC labour research economist and CCPA author David Fairey notes, farm workers, truck drivers, surface miners, oil and gas field workers, commission salespersons, fish farm workers, high technology professionals and managers are excluded from some or all provisions of the Act.<sup>19</sup> Unionized workers (which account for 34 per cent of the BC labour force) have been excluded from the Employment Standards Act, and while union-

ized workers typically have better protection under collective agreements than under the ESA, their exclusion changed the floor above which unions must now bargain. Further, as Fairey documents, the exclusion of unionized workers from the ESA has led to working conditions below those outlined in the ESA.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the change in enforcement from monitoring to a complaint-driven system has reduced the number of complaints<sup>21</sup> and this is likely to be associated with a greater degree of non-compliance with the ESA.

Second, the reduction in public sector jobs and related contracting-out of some services, such as hospital support services, is likely to have indirectly contributed to the rise in casual work. For example, in a 2004 CCPA report, Sylvia Fuller and Lindsay Stephens found that between 2001 and 2004 there was a loss of over 20,477 public sector jobs.<sup>22</sup> Of the lost public sector jobs, 75

per cent were held by women.<sup>23</sup> Of the 20,447 total lost public sector jobs, 10,410 were part of the Hospital Employees' Union and many of these jobs were then moved into the private sector. Although we do not know what percentage of the 10,410 previously unionized jobs were maintained once they were moved to the private sector, it is likely that the form of employment is less secure compared to the previously unionized jobs. The privatization and outsourcing of these jobs has certainly led to a reduction in wages for this type of work,<sup>24</sup> which reduces the economic security of these workers.

The reduction in public sector jobs and related contracting-out of some services, such as hospital support services, is likely to have indirectly contributed to the rise in casual work. For example, Although, we do not know what percentage of the 10,410 previously unionized health care jobs were maintained once they were moved to the private sector, it is likely that the form of employment is less secure compared to the previously unionized jobs.

Third, from the supply side, the reduction in the number of people on welfare, as a result of policies that reduced access, may also have contributed to the number of people forced into the most insecure forms of casual work. There was a precipitous drop in the social assistance rate in BC from 6.1 per cent of the population in 2001 to 3.7 per cent in 2004.<sup>25</sup> Although the economy grew over the period from 2001 to 2004, and this would be expected to result in a decline in numbers of people receiving social assistance, as the 2006 CCPA study *Denied Assistance* found, the improvement in the economy can only account for about half the decline in numbers of people receiving social assistance.<sup>26</sup> The remaining decline is the result of a decrease in the number of people accessing the system, and, as the report indicates, there

was a decline in the acceptance rate from 90 per cent of applications to 51 per cent between 2001 and 2004. It is plausible that some of the people “denied assistance” will be trying to obtain any form of employment and this is likely to increase the number of people looking for casual work.

To test the hypothesis that BC government policies contributed to the rise in casual work, we use micro-data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey.<sup>27</sup> We use the Statistics Canada variable “temporary work” which is the narrow definition of casual work as discussed in Section 2.

The trends in temporary employment for the 1997 to 2007 period are shown in Table 7 on page 25 (and Figure 2 on page 14). Notice from Table 7 that, first, the percentage of casual workers in BC is higher in the 2001 to 2007 period, compared to the 1997 to 2000 period, consistent with the hypothesis that government policy contributed to the rise in casual work. Notice also



that the rate of increase of “casualization” has been higher for women than for men. As a result, while men and women were approximately equal in terms of the absolute numbers of casual workers in 1997, female casual workers now outnumber male casual workers.

Second, the percentage of casual workers continued to increase in BC, despite economic growth and falling unemployment rates, in the period after 2000. Despite the economic growth in the 2001 to 2007 period, the percentage of casual workers did not decline (see Figure 2 on page 14). Thus, the increase in casual workers is striking because, given macroeconomic conditions, the percentage of casual workers would actually have been expected to decline.

These two results suggest that government policy after 2000 contributed to the rise in casual work in BC. However, to assess this hypothesis more concretely, we analyze the rise in casual work in BC taking account of a variety of factors that could plausibly increase casual work, including government policy. We hypothesized that the likelihood of being a casual worker in a given province depends on:

- the demand for casual workers arising from (i) specific needs given the industry and occupation structure and (ii) the macroeconomic conditions;
- the supply of casual workers arising from (i) age and (ii) marital status; and
- the government policy that (i) increases the demand for casual workers through changes in employment standards that make it easier to hire casual workers and by contracting out and (ii) increases the supply of casual workers by denying people access to social assistance and making it more difficult for people to acquire employable skills.

**Table 7: Trends in Casual Work, Canada and BC, Women and Men, 1997–2007**

Year	Canada				British Columbia			
	Numbers (in thousands)		Percentage		Numbers (in thousands)		Percentage	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
1997	631.9	652.2	11.68	10.96	73.7	72.9	10.2	9.4
1998	702.3	672.2	12.59	11.09	81.9	74.8	11.4	9.9
1999	721.2	717.3	12.52	11.54	83.1	82.4	11.1	10.8
2000	788.1	759.7	13.23	11.81	94.5	92.9	12.3	11.5
2001	838.7	781.1	13.67	11.96	102.7	94.2	13.3	11.8
2002	857.1	824.0	13.58	12.33	108.4	102.5	13.7	12.7
2003	840.3	811.1	12.94	11.97	103.5	96.4	12.7	11.7
2004	896.5	824.8	13.53	12.01	111.1	95.4	13.3	11.4
2005	930.1	867.5	13.86	12.48	106.9	97.4	12.5	11.3
2006	945.8	877.3	13.75	12.35	112.8	96.6	12.7	10.8
2007	955.7	886.9	13.53	12.34	111.1	94.6	12.3	10.1

Note: Using the Statistics Canada definition of “temporary,” which refers to having a paid job expected to last for less than six months. Estimated for employees aged 15 years and older.

Source: Derived from Statistics Canada CANSIM Table 282-0080.

We test the hypothesis that the incidence of casual work in BC is higher in the post-2000 period compared to the earlier period using a logistic model of the odds of being a casual worker.<sup>28</sup> First, we consider whether the likelihood of being a casual worker in BC is greater after the policy changes initiated in 2001. The results are shown in Appendix B. The odds ratio of being a casual worker between the time period 2001–2004 and 1997–2000 is 1.176 (see the Time Period: 2001–2004 variable in column 1). In other words, the odds of being a casual worker in the 2001–2004 period is 17.6 per cent higher compared to the previous period; this is after controlling for differences in annual growth rates over the entire period 1997–2004 and any possible changes in industrial and occupational structure. For women in BC, the odds ratio between the two time periods is 1.189 and for men, it is slightly lower at 1.160 (see the odds ratio for the Time Period: 2001–2004 variables in columns 3 and 2, respectively). See Table B1.

Second, we consider whether the higher odds of being a casual worker in BC in the post-2001 period reflect a nation-wide trend, or whether there is a separate “BC effect.” To test for this

BC effect, we estimate whether the odds of being a casual worker is higher in the later period in Canada (excluding BC); thus, the same model is estimated for the remaining nine provinces. The results are also shown in Appendix Table B2. For all workers in Canada (minus BC), the odds ratio of being a casual worker between the time period 2001–2004 and 1997–2000 is 0.961; this result indicates that the odds of being a casual worker in Canada (minus BC) is lower in the 2001–2004 period, compared to the 1997–2000 period. See Table B2.

Comparing the results for BC and Canada indicates that a striking “BC effect” exists. The odds of being a casual worker in the post-2001 period in BC were higher than the previous period, whereas the odds of being a casual worker in the post-2001 period in the rest of Canada were actually lower.

Comparing the results for BC and Canada indicates that a striking “BC effect” exists. The odds of being a casual worker in the post-2001 period in BC were higher than the previous period, whereas the odds of being a casual worker in the post-2001 period in the rest of Canada were actually lower. In Canada excluding BC, strong economic growth has led, as is usual, to a reduction in the percentage of casual workers as firms take on permanent employees. BC is an exception—strong economic growth has

been accompanied by an increase in the use of casual workers, with the labour and welfare regulation changes introduced since 2001 contributing to an acceleration of the casualization of employment, and with the increase being the greatest for women.

# Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The policies introduced after 2001 relating to the Employment Standards Act, social assistance and contracting-out have decreased the economic security of casual workers in BC. First, casual workers were negatively impacted by changes such as the reduction in the call-in period, and the lack of enforcement of the Employment Standards Act. Second, it became more difficult for workers to acquire training and education, and make care arrangements necessary for the transition from casual to permanent work. Third, there was a rise in the number of casual workers as a result of these policies.

Government policies were intended to increase individuals' reliance on the labour market for economic security; however, these same policies decreased the ability of labour markets to provide economic security. A tragic contradiction.

## Policies to Enhance Economic Security

BC government policies have shifted the economy toward a more “flexible” labour regime, largely to the benefit of employers. For BC to become “the best place to work,” the challenge for employment policy in BC is now to improve economic security for workers.

In thinking about policies, the use of metaphors has become commonplace. Perhaps the most common metaphor in this context is the welfare state as a safety net, a device intended to prevent individuals from falling into poverty—with critiques suggesting that recent policy changes have enlarged the size of the net’s mesh, resulting in more people falling through. This type of analogy can be powerful both in terms of thinking about the welfare state and for mobilizing public support for it. In thinking about policies to address the rise of casual work and its impacts on economic security, a similar metaphor is needed. We propose that the quilt could serve as an appropriate metaphor. The quilt is comprehensive in coverage—it is not just an ill-designed patchwork, but is made up of individual pieces tailored to meet specific needs. Our governments need to take up quilting.

The need for comprehensive policies is evident from the inter-relationships between paid work, unpaid work and public services, and the complexity of achieving a work-life balance, a situation that for many casual workers is bad work and no life.

Increasing the economic security of casual workers requires a comprehensive approach rather than being achievable by a few specific interventions. At the same time, variation among casual jobs, and differences between the experiences and constraints of men and women, between different locations, and between immigrants and Canadian-born workers, illustrate the heterogeneous nature of the casual workforce and the need for variation in the policy fabric and tailoring to specific situations.

Interpreted in the context of BC, these observations indicate that recent policy changes have not been providing a quilt, but rather, removing the cover. A change in direction is needed.

As a way of operationalizing the idea of a quilt, we can think about an “economic security matrix” for casual workers, the dimensions of which constitute the quilt. The width of the quilt, corresponding to the columns of the matrix, is provided by the various dimensions of economic security. The length of the quilt, corresponding to the rows of the matrix, is provided by the levels at which policy analysis takes place. In this respect, we distinguish between three levels: policies that increase the economic security of those in casual employment; policies that assist in the transition from casual to permanent employment; and, policies designed to increase the security of all society’s members including casual workers—policies that can be thought of as the development of social rights. We represent the casual work policy quilt in Table 8 on page 29.

Income security can be increased through changes to the minimum wage level, indexing minimum wage to inflation, as well as through the maintenance of full employment. It is clear that the state of the labour market influences the wages that casual workers can command.

BC government policies have shifted the economy toward a more “flexible” labour regime, largely to the benefit of employers. For BC to become “the best place to work,” the challenge for employment policy in BC is now to improve economic security for workers.

Anecdotally, in some of the towns of northern BC and Alberta, the oil and gas boom has raised wages at McDonald's to two-and-a-half to three times the provincial minimum wage. Thus, full employment policies are clearly important for the economic security of those in casual work. However, as we have demonstrated, economic growth alone will not reduce the percentages of people in casual employment, since the regulatory framework and policy matters.

To increase economic security for casual workers, it is also necessary to increase their access to non-wage benefits derived from employment and from the state. There may be some scope for increasing access to non-wage enterprise benefits by ensuring that all workers, regardless of employment status, have access to these benefits. This is similar to the argument that part-time workers should have access to non-wage benefits, such as health and dental benefits, on a pro-rated basis. The problem for casual workers is that their access to benefits will be sporadic at best if they are employed intermittently or if they are defined as self-employed, rather than employed, by an enterprise. Therefore, there is a need to broaden the basis for access to rights, as discussed further below, under the third level of policy objectives.

Of note, Quebec recently took over the administration of Employment Insurance maternity/parental leave benefits, and upon doing so, changed the rules governing the program. In that province, self-employed workers can now access these benefits—a huge gain for a group that is disproportionately women, and often casually employed. Quebec's model should be replicated in other provinces, and ideally nationally.

To increase employment, job, and work security, it is necessary to ensure that the regulations around termination notice, dismissal, minimum notice about working time, parental leave,

Table 8: The Economic Security Quilt: BC Results						
Policy objective – improve:	Economic security					
	Income		Skills	Employment/ job/work	Representation	Time
	Monetary	Social				
Security in casual employment	Increases in minimum wage; Indexation of minimum wage; Full employment	Provision of higher standard of health and care benefits not linked to employment		Expand coverage of ESA to include all workers not just “employees”; Re-introduce monitoring and enforcement of ESA	Facilitate unionization; Explore new representational mechanisms; Expand coverage of ESA	Improve employment standards legislation on notice periods, minimum call-in periods, contract length
Transition from casual to permanent employment	Full employment; Income-while-studying grants		Financial accessibility and availability of courses; Equity hiring for public sector jobs; Social partnership model of industry training			Improve rights of casual workers to permanent jobs
Security of all members of society or social rights	<i>Minimum guaranteed income; Relationship with EI, other programs</i>	<i>Child care</i>		Rethink who is an employee and include contractors, etc. in legislation		

vacation pay, and others apply to all workers regardless of their contract status. Coverage could be expanded not only to casual workers but also to dependent contractors and self-employed workers. Employment standards regulations could also be extended to include new provisions for leave, in order to accommodate workers' need to provide care for children and the elderly, and compassionate leave.

In BC, the change in method of enforcement from proactive monitoring to self-reporting should be reversed. The idea that governments should enforce compliance with labour codes is endorsed by the Arthurs report on Canadian federal labour standards.<sup>29</sup>

Results from our survey show an important role for trade unions as mechanisms for increasing the representation security of those in casual work. The role of trade unions in this respect has been the subject of debate, with some questioning of the ability of trade unions to advance the interests of casual workers at the same time as, or more strongly in competition with, the interests of permanent workers. In BC, the results of our survey indicate that casual workers'

representational security through trade unions is valued. In the context of BC, with its high immigrant population, it is also appropriate to consider whether community-based organizations, perhaps working in conjunction with unions, could provide an additional vehicle to improve the representational security of immigrant workers.

Improving time security for all workers, not just casual workers, could be achieved by reversing the changes made to the Employment Standards Act that reduced the minimum call-in period and established the overtime averaging rule. Ensuring that employment standards regulations cover all casual workers as well as permanent workers would go a long way to improve the time security of casual workers, since they would then have minimum advance notice of work schedules and notice of termination. Also related to time security is the policy of some unions to prevent or limit overtime, which would increase workers' control over time and reduce workplace stress.

Since caregiving (of all types) is likely to remain significantly in the private domain for the immediate future, there are some policy measures that could be taken to ease the work-life collision,

particularly for women, which would assist workers, especially casual workers. It is casual workers who have been at the sharp end of the need for "flexibility" by employers to be able to call in workers as and when needed. To redress this, it has been proposed that workers also be given greater "flexibility" in scheduling their work to accommodate their caregiving responsibilities. For example, the Canadian Labour Congress argues that "more time flexibility to meet the needs of workers is needed, not just to meet the needs of working women, but also to provide a basis for a more equitable sharing of caring responsibilities between women and men."<sup>30</sup> It therefore proposes that workers should have the right to take up to 10 days paid leave per year to deal with personal and family responsibilities and up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to assume significant, temporary caregiving responsibilities. It will be challenging to secure these rights for permanent employees; extending them to casual workers, many of whom operate

To increase employment, job, and work security, it is necessary to ensure that the regulations around termination notice, dismissal, minimum notice about working time, parental leave, vacation pay, and others apply to all workers regardless of their contract status. Coverage could be expanded not only to casual workers but also to dependent contractors and self-employed workers.

without employment contracts, will be more difficult still. But “time sovereignty,” as The Work Foundation has called it, is perhaps even more important to casual workers and represents an enhanced form of what we have termed time security.

Moving now to the transition between casual and permanent employment, financially accessible education and training programs are vital to the ability of casual workers to move to permanent employment. An “income-while-in-education” program would clearly be of advantage to many casual workers.

Education and training, however, should not be seen as a panacea. Indeed, in our survey, over 50 per cent of the immigrant community (and 22 per cent of Canadian-born women but only 5.3 per cent of Canadian-born men) had completed university degrees and yet were still in casual work, unable to find permanent jobs. These findings point to the need for variation in the quilt’s design to address the specific needs of immigrant casual workers, where issues of the transferability of credentials and perhaps the need for short adjustment courses are critical. Sixty per cent of Canadian-born men said they used their training (whether formal or on-the-job) all the time in their current jobs, whereas only 26 per cent of non-Canadian-born men reported this. An evaluation of the new apprenticeship program should be undertaken and changes to improve the system implemented quickly.

Other policies to assist the transition from casual to permanent work include practices used in other jurisdictions, such as incentives and requirements for employers to make permanent positions available to casual workers and to limit the phenomenon of “permanent casual” employment. Both Australia and the European Union have variations of such policies. In a similar vein, it has been proposed by the Canadian Labour Congress that the federal labour code be changed so that “non-renewal of a contract after one year’s employment should be considered as grounds for unjust dismissal, if there is no just cause for non-renewal, and if work is being performed by a newly hired worker of another contractor.”<sup>31</sup>

Moving to the level of social rights—that is, to rights that are available to all as members of society—it is clear that the low level of benefits available to casual workers requires a rethinking of the traditional mechanism of access to benefits. Canada, like many other OECD countries, has adopted the model of the availability of health care and dental benefits being channeled through the workplace, supplemented by a floor provided by the state. This regime stood more chance of being successful in the period of full-employment during the “Golden Age,” the immediate post-war period, but is increasingly flawed in the new circumstances of the casualization of work, with employment no longer being associated with care benefits. There are many casual jobs in BC that provide low levels of economic security across a broad range of security indicators, including access to Employment Insurance benefits, medical and dental benefits, pensions, and parental leave and benefits. For holders of these jobs, what is required is a new foundation on which entitlements are based. What must be considered, therefore, is a shift to care entitlements based upon social rights rather than through employment, a debate that has been occurring in the European context<sup>32</sup> and needs to take place more extensively in Canada.

## Extensions

The quilt produced so far reflects the results of our survey. However, this survey is limited in important respects. The survey is relatively small in size and some groups were deliberately excluded (such as full-time students). Furthermore, we excluded those in self-employment and younger workers were under-represented.

These limitations mean that important parts of the quilt are missing, but we can provide some guidance as to what they might look like. For example, any extended discussion would also need to include child care more explicitly. In this context, it is worth noting, as University of Toronto professor Kerry Rittich does, that “issues such as child care and early childhood education, health and home care, welfare and social protection, housing and many others ... in North America, with the important exception of Quebec, have traditionally been regarded as either peripheral to the question of work or simply ‘private’ concerns.”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, despite

universal child care in Quebec, Canada has nevertheless earned itself a reputation as “an international laggard.”<sup>34</sup> Expansion of quality child care (which recognizes, at least, the relationship with labour market policy<sup>35</sup>) would contribute to improvements in the economic security of casual workers and facilitate transitions from casual to permanent work.

This situation is very evident in BC today. Child care subsidies were cut in 2002, with the result that many low and middle income parents withdrew their children from organized daycare.<sup>36</sup> Some funding was restored in 2004 and in September 2005, although child care remains a critical issue. The new federal government’s introduction of cash payments to parents with children under the age of six may be beneficial in increasing the incomes of low-paid parents, but does little to increase the availability of organized child care. As one of the female casual workers in our survey

commented, she receives little notice that she is being called in to work and is often unsure how long her shift will be. Child care centres are not geared to accept “drop-ins.” This dilemma is not solved, or even recognized, by current child care policy provincially or nationally. The needs of casual workers are not considered; they are left on their own to seek private solutions to the clash between casual work and permanent care responsibilities.

As a further extension, the lines between an “employee” and a “self-employed” individual have been increasingly blurred in the presence of contracting out and temporary agency hiring. Thus, beyond the existing employment standards legislation, there is a need to reflect the reality of who is a worker. The concept of an “employee” is currently used as the basis for deciding who is covered by employment standards legislation (even though many employees have been deliberately excluded from coverage in BC, as explained above). However, the growth of self-employment and contractors, as well as the use of temporary agencies where the employer is vaguely defined, has often led to many other workers being excluded. This latter example is particularly relevant for casual workers. Moving from the concept of an employee to a worker—a person who has only their labour to sell—would lead to an expansion of the

The environment in which casual workers find themselves reflects a world in which labour is often no more than a disposable resource available at the whim of employers. Many of the policies outlined above require a shift in the balance of power between capital and labour.



protections afforded by employment standards legislation to a much wider range of currently vulnerable workers.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, the environment in which casual workers find themselves reflects a world in which labour is often no more than a disposable resource available at the whim of employers. Many of the policies outlined above require a shift in the balance of power between capital and labour. A further shift could entail the partial de-commodification of labour through the introduction of a guaranteed minimum income, a guarantee that would increase income security for all, but would be most useful to those, such as casual workers, who currently have high degrees of income insecurity. Existing programs designed to stabilize or raise incomes, such as the Employment Insurance program, could be evaluated to assess the biases against casual workers. For example, with respect to Employment Insurance, it may be more difficult for casual workers to meet the minimum hours' requirement if the jobs are of relatively short duration. Further, any income-supplement programs, such as the Child Tax Benefit, that base the supplement on last year's reported income may be insufficient to meet people's current income needs.

By incorporating these extensions, the quilt can be further completed (as indicated by the italicized sections in Table 8).

## Economic Security: The New Challenge for Policy in BC

We have argued that the new challenge for policymakers in BC is to increase the economic security of workers. While indicators such as unemployment and job creation rates show, to some people, that all is well for workers, evidence from the Labour Force Survey and the special survey conducted for this study demonstrates that while more people are working, this does not necessarily translate into greater economic security for all workers. First, the incidence of casual workers is greater than expected, given recent economic growth and low unemployment rates. Second, casual workers experience enormous economic insecurity across a variety of dimensions. And third, recent government policies have intensified the problem rather than reducing economic insecurity.

The new challenge for policy in BC is to increase economic security. As a contribution to meeting this challenge, we have suggested some of the fabric from which a policy quilt for casual workers could be woven.

# Notes

- 1 Retrieved from CANSIM Table 282-0002, Statistics Canada.
- 2 Yalnizyan 2007.
- 3 “Self-employed, own-account workers” refers to people who are self-employed but do not hire other individuals or employees. We exclude unpaid family workers defined as family members who work in a family business but are unpaid.
- 4 International Labour Organization (ILO) 2004.
- 5 See, for example, Standing 2002.
- 6 Standing 2002.
- 7 The ILO report (2004: 171) does discuss time insecurity, but the focus is on the large number of hours worked per day and total working time, rather than the control over scheduling of working time, which is the focus here.
- 8 While the Labour Force Survey has a question regarding a part-time worker’s reason for part-time work, it does not have a similar question on the reason for temporary work.
- 9 The results reported here are drawn from those reported in MacPhail and Bowles (2008a); readers interested in a more extended analysis are referred to this paper.
- 10 See Holmlund and Storrie 2002.
- 11 ILO 2004: 191.
- 12 ILO 2004: Chapter 8.
- 13 Derived from CANSIM Table 282-0074, Statistics Canada.
- 14 ILO 2004: 55.
- 15 See Fairey 2005.
- 16 Klein and Long 2003.
- 17 See Fuller and Stephens 2004.
- 18 The results reported in this sub-section are drawn from those reported in MacPhail and Bowles (2008b); readers interested in a more technical analysis are referred to this paper.
- 19 Fairey 2005.
- 20 Fairey 2007.
- 21 Fairey 2005.
- 22 Fuller and Stephens 2004.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Cohen and Cohen 2005.
- 25 BC Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance 2005. This corresponds to a drop in recipients from 249,313 to 156,951 over this period.
- 26 Wallace, Klein, and Reitsma-Street 2006.

- 27 The starting year is determined by the first year in which the category of “temporary worker” was reported.
- 28 Details of the logistic model are provided in Appendix B.
- 29 *Fairness at Work: Federal Labour Standards for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, is Harry Arthurs’ review of the federal Canada Labour Code, which was commissioned by the Minister of Labour.
- 30 Canadian Labour Congress 2005: 20.
- 31 Canadian Labour Congress 2005: 15.
- 32 See Vielle and Walthery 2003.
- 33 Rittich 2004: 38.
- 34 Kershaw 2004: 928.
- 35 As outlined, for example, by White 2001.
- 36 For details of the new policies, see work by the Child Care Advocacy Forum of BC at [www.cccabc.bc.ca/forum](http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/forum).
- 37 Fudge, Tucker, and Vosko 2002.

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## APPENDIX A

# Description of the Casual Worker Survey

To examine the implications of casual work for economic security, we drew upon a survey of 160 casual workers that we undertook in 2005, in two BC cities—Vancouver and Prince George. Through the face-to-face interviews, we sought information on personal characteristics, experiences with casual work, working conditions, perceptions of economic security, and assessment of government policies. We focused on dimensions of economic security, discussed by Standing (2002: 442) and ILO (2004); and the survey questions on economic security were adapted from the ILO's People's Security Survey, a survey used in 15 countries, the results of which are summarized in ILO (2004).

The workers for the survey were recruited by various means including newspaper advertising, as well as through specific organizations such as the Native Friendship Centre and the Immigrant and Multicultural Service Society in Prince George, and MOSAIC and the Canadian Union of Public Employees in Vancouver. Because of the nature of casual work, it was necessary to use a variety of survey recruitment methods and the survey is not a representative sample. This arises partly because of the difficulty in undertaking a representative survey among a population that

**Table A1: Descriptive Statistics of the Casual Workers Survey**

	Average age (years)	Percentage with Grade 12 or less education	Sample size
Men (all)	37.1	50.8	60
Men (born in Canada)	37.2	63.1	37
Men (born outside Canada)	34.4	30.4	23
Men (Prince George)	40.5	75.0	20
Men (Vancouver)	35.5	39.0	40
Women (all)	35.9	35.2	100
Women (born in Canada)	37.0	40.7	60
Women (born outside Canada)	38.1	25.6	40
Women (Prince George)	38.1	30.0	23
Women (Vancouver)	35.3	38.8	77

Source: Casual worker survey conducted for this report in 2005.

is difficult to contact (particularly the case for younger casual workers), but also by design as we sought to over-sample some populations. In particular, we wanted to over-sample casual workers at the lower end of the wage distribution since this is where the policy challenge of increasing economic security is most needed. We also wanted to include a significant number of union and non-union members, immigrants and Canadian-born workers. We were also primarily interested in workers who were not casual workers by choice and, for this reason, deliberately excluded female nurses, for example, who sometimes prefer the flexibility afforded by casual work, even though the health care sector is a large employer of casual workers.

Some of the descriptive statistics of the sample are given in Table A1 on page 37. As can be seen, the average age of the sample is fairly high (compared to the age distribution of casual workers in the province indicated by the Labour Force Survey) and with little variation between sub-groups. There are, however, considerable variations in levels of educational attainment. In Prince George, the men in our sample tended to have lower educational attainment than women (which is not the case in Vancouver). Canadian-born men and women have substantially lower levels of educational attainment than immigrant men and women, and the men in Prince George in our sample have substantially lower levels of education than those in Vancouver.

# Logit Model of the Likelihood of Being a Casual Worker

On the demand side, economic conditions and the demand for labour are proxied by annual provincial growth rates, and the industrial and occupational structures are measured by a set of industry and occupational categorical variables. On the supply side, age and education are proxied by a set of categorical variables. The change in the policy regime in BC was initiated in 2001 and hence the time period 1997 to 2004 is divided into two periods, namely 1997 to 2000 and 2001 to 2004. We use the Labour Force Survey microdata, pooled for the period 1997 to 2004, for the sample of employees aged 20 to 64 years, excluding full-time students. We chose this particular sample, rather than all employees aged 15 years and older (as used in previous tables) because we wanted to focus on the group of employees most likely to be involuntarily in casual jobs.

**Table B1: Logistic Regression of being a Casual Worker, BC, 1997–2004**

Independent variables	Dependent variable: Casual worker	
	Model 1 Exp ( $\beta$ ) <sup>a</sup>	Model 2 Exp ( $\beta$ ) <sup>a</sup>
Age 30–39	0.537	0.549
Age 40–49	0.460	0.456
Age 50–59	0.429	0.418
Age 60–64	0.599	0.594
Education: High school diploma	0.656	0.822
Education: Some post-secondary	0.933	1.198
Education: Post-secondary diploma	0.783	0.977
Education: University degree	0.835	1.023
Female	1.180	1.262
Constant	0.211	0.145
N (unweighted)	391,635	391,635

Notes: <sup>a</sup> For each odds ratio, the Exp ( $\beta$ ), the  $p$ -value is 0.000; therefore, each of the variables are significant given that  $p$ -value < critical  $p$ .

1. The logistic regression of being a casual worker is estimated for employed people aged 20 to 64 years, excluding full-time students.
2. The model is estimated using cross-section weights.
3. Reference categories are: male; age 20–29; education less than high school.
4. Model 2 includes industry and occupation dummy variables as controls, although the results for these industry and occupation variables are not presented.

Source: Authors' calculations from the Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey, monthly data, 1997–2004.

**Table B2: Logistic Regression of Being a Casual Worker in BC, and Canada Excluding BC, 1997–2000 Compared to 2001–2004**

Independent variable	Dependent variable: Casual employee					
	British Columbia			Canada (excluding BC)		
	Total (1)	Men (2)	Women (3)	Total (4)	Men (5)	Women (6)
	Exp ( $\beta$ ) <sup>a</sup>					
Age 30–39	0.549	0.519	0.580	0.507	0.493	0.522
Age 40–49	0.453	0.416	0.493	0.427	0.410	0.445
Age 50–59	0.413	0.427	0.408	0.426	0.452	0.412
Age 60–64	0.587	0.651	0.539	0.619	0.685	0.552
Education: High school diploma	0.816	0.794	0.860	0.752	0.708	0.828
Education: Some post-secondary	1.186	1.248	1.182	1.279	1.264	1.336
Education: Post-secondary diploma	0.970	0.954	1.039	0.933	0.910	1.005
Education: University degree	1.011	0.993	1.059	1.022	0.913	1.149
GDP growth rate	1.021	1.017	1.027	0.976	0.978	0.974
Female	1.260	--	--	1.262	--	--
Time period: 2001–2004	1.176	1.160	1.189	0.961	0.960	0.959
Constant	0.285	0.089	0.164	0.091	0.079	0.135
N (unweighted)	391,635	197,958	193,677	3,949,086	2,014,670	1,934,416

Notes: <sup>a</sup> For each odds ratio, the Exp ( $\beta$ ), the  $p$ -value is 0.000; therefore, each of the variables are significant given that  $p$ -value < critical  $p$ .

1. The logistic regression of being a casual worker is estimated for employed people aged 20 to 64 years, excluding full-time students.
2. The model is estimated using cross-section weights.
3. Reference categories are: male; age 20–29; education less than high school; time period 1997–2000.
4. Includes industry and occupation dummy variables as controls (results not presented here but available from the authors on request) and provincial-year growth rates.

Source: Authors' calculations from the Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey, monthly, 1997–2004.





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The Economic Security Project is a major research initiative of the CCPA's BC Office and Simon Fraser University, in partnership with 24 community organizations and four BC universities.

The project examines how recent provincial policy changes affect the economic well-being of vulnerable people in BC, such as those who rely on social assistance, low-wage earners, recent immigrants, youth and others. It also develops and promotes policy solutions that improve economic security.

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