

INTRODUCTION

The following proceedings and bibliography followed naturally from a workshop held at Victoria University in May 1984. The idea for the workshop itself grew out of a mutual interest held by the authors in research on labour and employment issues in New Zealand. Our assumptions in late 1983 were that the amount of such work carried out in New Zealand was relatively slim and that there were a relatively small number of people currently undertaking such research. We were subsequently proved wrong on both counts. The interest in the workshop was much higher than expected and attendance had to be limited to those actively engaged in research. Even without those unable to attend because of other commitments, the number of participants reached nearly 40. The size of the bibliography soon exposed the second incorrect assumption. The fact that the entries now total nearly 2650 and stretch back into the nineteenth century belies the fact that New Zealanders had neglected this area of social and economy inquiry. This led us to look for the reasons behind our incorrect impression of labour and employment research in New Zealand.

The reason is remarkably simple : we were victims of the fragmentation and lack of communication which characterises research in this country. The solution we hope will also be equally simple. In our introductory address to the workshop we observed that there had developed in New Zealand a growing concern over labour and employment issues and that this was now spread through several disciplines and Government departments and was the subject of major concern in a variety of privately funded and voluntary agencies. We observed that the problem of lack of employment in particular was claiming the attention of a number of local bodies who were being faced with requests for employment related assistance.

Despite the long history of research into labour and employment issues in New Zealand as revealed by the bibliography, and the high social and political profile employment issues have received during the 1980s, there is a broad consensus that contemporary labour and employment research in New Zealand is in an undeveloped state. As one local MP put it, although unemployment was the number one issue concerning New Zealanders, "we know more about the reproductive organs of sheep than we know about the operation of the New Zealand labour market" (Neilson, *Evening Post*, 9 May 1984). There are many possible responses one could make to this observation. What is interesting for our purposes is to look at this country's reaction to the

need to know more about the reproductive organs of sheep. Recognising that research skills in that area were scarce and that they must be used efficiently, the response was to set up an appropriate research institution. The resulting quality of research is now some of the best in the world. Compare this to the current perceived need for knowledge of the New Zealand labour market. What we find is no identifiable institutional umbrella and no Government attempt to bring people together to initiate research. The present picture is one of scattered individuals and groups in a multitude of institutional and geographical settings doing work which addresses to greater or lesser degree their own particular questions, often in ignorance of work going on elsewhere in the country. The result is duplication, frustration and a waste of valuable skilled resources.

The idea behind the workshop and this publication is a belief that this fragmentation and lack of communication need not and ought not be the case. Many of the barriers to better communication and sharing of ideas in New Zealand are quite superficial and, with a little effort, researchers can be brought together and valuable substantive and methodological ideas shared. Certainly that proved to be the case for those present at the workshop. The result is a request by participants that we meet again in a conference-workshop in May 1985.

The concept of the workshop is an important one because the old ways, the annual or biannual conference held by the various university disciplines or internal seminars held within Government departments, were felt by many to be inadequate as a forum for discussion of research into major social questions. In many cases, the aim of such professional or departmental meetings tends to be the protection and development of the society or institution rather than the extension and development of knowledge of the substantive issues at hand.

A number of these ideas were developed and expanded on by the Vice-Chancellor of Victoria University, Dr Ian Axford, who noted in his opening address a similar lack of communication between some New Zealand university departments. After strongly supporting the workshop, he urged participants to consider new ways of bringing people together and regularly sharing ideas.

This volume summarises the results of the workshop. It presents, in sequence : the programme adopted, the list of participants, summaries of their research, reports from the workshop discussion groups, papers on statistical sources from the Departments of Statistics and Labour and the bibliography.

Editors