

4:00 pm Friday 28 Jly 2006

Herbert Spencer in Kath and Kim land: class politics and the petty-bourgeoisie in Australia during the Howard years

Geoff Robinson

A dominant trope of media commentary after the 2004 federal election was the rise of blue-collar self-employment and small business and its negative impact on Labor electoral support. In this paper I examine the evidence on the growth of self-employment and small business in Australia since the 1980s and the political consequences of this growth. I consider why the growth of self-employment and small business has been overstated by many observers, and the emergence of a right-wing critique of the dependence of wage-labour that revives the arguments of Herbert Spencer. These arguments are linked to the Independent Contractors legislation currently before federal parliament. I draw on the Household Income and Labour Dynamics and Australian Election Surveys to examine the political behaviour, work satisfaction, motivations and attitudes of the self-employed and small businesspeople since 1996.

Dr Geoff Robinson is Lecturer in Australian Studies and Politics at Deakin University, Warrnambool campus. He has published several articles and conference papers on Australian labour history and quantitative political history.

**There is no entry charge and everyone is welcome.
Drinks and nibbles will be provided.**

The Blue Room, Building B, Room B2.20, Burwood Campus, Deakin University