



The McGill-Montreal Chapter

Sigma Xi :: The Scientific Research Society ::



Dr. Michael R. Smith

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McGill University

PUBLIC LECTURE

when:

Monday 2 April 2007 6:00 P.M.

where:

McGill University Otto Maass Chemistry room 10

The Welfare State and its Consequences: The case of unemployment insurance

Over a long period, but particularly since the second world war, rich countries have equipped themselves with a set of protections - the welfare state - that, among other things, reduce the likelihood that people will experience catastrophic income loss. While, at least within Canada, the welfare state itself is not a matter of debate, the design of its institutions is.

There has been particular interest in the design of the (un)employment insurance program. Until the early 1980s Canadian and U.S. unemployment rates were generally close. Since the early 1980s Canadian unemployment rates have persistently exceeded U.S. rates - in the mid 1990s by quite a lot. The extent to which this gap can be attributed to program design differences has been the subject of considerable debate. In this paper I review this debate. Then I further explore potential program design effects using comparative data from Canada and Australia, two countries with very different unemployment compensation program designs.

Biographical Note

Michael Smith's research has dealt with labour markets and economic sociology more generally. He has published on, among other things, differences in the labour market outcomes of visible minority immigrants and other Canadians, labour market flexibility in Sweden and Canada, the sources of national differences in rates of inflation after the second world war, income and earnings inequality, the labour market effects of globalization, and the effects of technological change on the demand for skills. He has been a visiting fellow at the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University and at the National Institute of Labour Studies at Flinders University of South Australia, a Chercheur invité with the Department of Sociology at the Université de Montréal, an Overseas Research Fellow of the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa, and Virtual Scholar in Residence with the Law Commission of Canada.

Table 1. Indicators of Employment Security

	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
Percent unemployed	3.6	4.4	7.0	3.9	5.9	7.1	7.5	10.5	8.1	9.5
Unemployment Duration (weeks)						13.9	14.7	21.7	16.8	24.3
Part time as percent total employment		4.2	6.7	9.6	12.3	13.3	13.0	15.5	15.3	18.6
Percent involuntary part-time employment						11.0	17.6	29.3	22.5	31.9



Council Meeting: 4:30 P.M.

Member Reception: 5:30 P.M.