

**AVERTING THE CRISIS – OR AVOIDING THE
COMPROMISE?**

**A Regulation Approach to Social Inclusion Policies and
Practices in the Australian Context**

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ABSTRACT

The South Australian Rann Labor government elected in 2002 became the first in the nation to address 'social exclusion' through the implementation of a Social Inclusion Initiative. The increasingly popular term 'social exclusion' was first used overseas in the early 1970s to describe serious symptoms of socio-economic disadvantage linked with global economic restructuring. Taking the South Australian policy initiative as a point of departure, this thesis provides a multi-layered analysis of social exclusion discourses and policy approaches, exploring their significance in the context of Australia's shifting welfare state terrain. In so doing, the thesis seeks to break new ground both at general theory and specific case study levels by utilising a regulation approach (RA) to test the research hypothesis that 'social inclusion' policies are reflective of a transitional neoliberal (or, in some instances, Third Way) mode of social regulation which is inadequate to arrest rising socio-economic inequality linked to the collapse of the post-war 'Fordist-Keynesian' consensus. The cross-disciplinary regulation approach is a method of inquiry used to analyse spatially and temporally specific shifts in phases of capitalist accumulation and the different policy and institutional arrangements that support accumulation in each phase. The complex and interrelated institutional shifts at the Australian national level are critical to understanding the origins and impact of 'social inclusion' policies. Hence the adoption of this type of policy approach at the South Australian state level is considered in a broader national political economic context where the phenomenon of social exclusion is located within national welfare to work reforms. By applying a regulationist lens to examine the global concept of social exclusion in a local and broader national setting, the thesis offers empirical evidence to one of the 'missing links' in the 'post-Fordist' literature. That is, it contributes to the debate about whether nascent neoliberal or Third Way modes of social regulation have potential to stabilise capitalism's inherent crisis tendencies, or whether they merely extend a period of institutional searching. The thesis concludes that the South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative in various ways appears to be not only partial and inadequate in its own terms, but fundamentally in conflict with the South Australian government's broader policy objectives. In short, it shows that the Initiative has inadequate capacity to address the impact of global structural changes that have caused the polarisation of wealth and increasing poverty. Furthermore, it is argued that this approach attempts to suppress

class dissent by silencing potential critics, and fails to intersect with or compensate for national level policies which have served to depress wages and simultaneously reduce the welfare safety net. It is concluded from these findings that these policies do not have the capacity to contribute to an equitable or sustainable new mode of social regulation. The thesis argues that a more comprehensive approach to 'social inclusion' is required in the post-Keynesian era and proposes further research to this end.

DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award or any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give my consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Roslyn Ann Averis

Date:

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