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Geoff Bertram & Bill Rosenberg

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The changing face of self-employment in Aotearoa New Zealand, 1939–2024

Geoff Bertram and Bill Rosenberg

School of History, Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

The self-employed have been an important part of the New Zealand labour force and economy over the past century, accounting for 15–20% of the employed labour force, with counter-cyclical swings in the ratio. There has been a dramatic change in their industry distribution, from a pattern dominated by agriculture, trade and the professions to one in which finance and business services are more dominant, though agriculture remains important. This paper is part of a wider project to estimate economic rents in New Zealand, but weak data about the self-employed, and conceptual issues, make it difficult to produce valid estimates for them. Our best estimate is that up to 1980 there were positive rents but that since then the self-employed have been, on average, failing to cover their costs of labour and capital. However, dramatically increased income inequality within the self-employed has seen a separation between a long-established high-income stratum and a fast-growing low-income precariat. This paper presents an extensive set of statistical tables covering the years 1939–2023.

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1. Introduction

In standard models of capitalism as an economic system, the self-employed are an analytical anomaly.

- The most common model, derived from Marx, divides the economically-active population into two groups, capitalists and workers. The ‘means of production’ (fixed assets or ‘capital’) are held and monopolised by the former, while the latter possess only a single productive asset – their labour power – which they sell for a wage. The defining feature of wage labour is the separation of workers from the means of production. In contrast, the defining feature of self-employment is the absence of that alienation of labour from capital.

CONTACT Geoff Bertram  geoffbertram1@gmail.com

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- Another familiar model, from classical economists such as Smith and Ricardo, has three great classes – capitalists, workers and landowners – receiving three categories of income – profit, wages and rent – that together exhaust the total product. Each class specialises in a particular activity: entrepreneurship for capitalists, labour for workers, and rent collection for landlords. The self-employed do not feature.

That neither of these economic models has space for the self-employed – individual producers who retain ownership and control of all three of the productive assets capital, labour and land, and whose income is a mixture of profits, wages and rents – is striking. Bechhofer and Elliott (1976, 74) remark that

The petite bourgeoisie is a stratum that has attracted little academic study. Historians have given it short shrift, the radical scholars dismissing it as the *petty* bourgeoisie and the aristocratic historians discounting its members as small fry of no significance. And historians are not alone in their neglect, for in economics, political science and sociology there is a similar disdain for those who cannot be cast in the hero's role in any of the major developments of western capitalism. The petite bourgeoisie remains in the wings because to writers of diverse opinions and academic specialisms it has appeared as essentially trivial.

Marx and Engels devoted little attention to the self-employed because they expected them to be squeezed out in the course of capitalist development:

In countries where modern civilisation has become fully developed, a new class of petty bourgeois has been formed, fluctuating between proletariat and bourgeoisie and ever renewing itself as a supplementary part of bourgeois society. The individual members of this class, however, are being constantly hurled down into the proletariat by the action of competition, and, as modern industry develops, they even see the moment approaching when they will completely disappear as an independent section of modern society, to be replaced, in manufactures, agriculture and commerce, by overlookers, bailiffs and shopmen. (Marx and Engels 1848/1962, p.56.).

A century and a half later, while there is clear evidence that the relative importance of self-employment has shrunk during economic development, the process of 'ever renewing itself' has sufficed to put a floor under the anticipated tendency to disappear. Peetz (2023 Figure 2 p.20) shows, using OECD data covering the years 1980–2021, that the rate of self-employment ('the proportion of employed people describing themselves as self-employed') in developed high-income capitalist countries has held steady, mainly between 10% and 20% of the total workforce. In middle-income countries the rate is generally much higher. In Peetz's charts Brazil, Mexico, Turkey, Greece and early-1980s South Korea have self-employment rates in the range 30–40%, while Colombia is over 50%.

The self-employed are, in effect, those who perform paid work but are not waged employees. A self-employed person may be either an employer, or someone who is working for themselves' (Peetz 2023, 12). As owners of capital the self-employed are in one sense little capitalists; yet as workers, albeit in their own enterprises, they are subject to the system's exploitative tendencies and often receive less than a full market return on their capital and labour (something that we document below in the case of New Zealand since the 1980s). In this paper we trace the fluctuating fortunes and changing composition of the self-employed in New Zealand over the past nine decades. This work is part of a wider project to extract from the national-income accounts a clear picture of, first, the

determination of the share of waged labour in the total and, second, the extent of excess profit (economic rent) accruing to corporate capital (Bertram and Rosenberg 2023, 2024). Taking the self-employed out of the aggregate numbers enables us to isolate the returns to capital in its undiluted form – the subject of a forthcoming paper.

In this paper, we first look at the number of self-employed individuals in relation to the total labour force and by industry. We then analyse self-employed income, identifying changes in industry composition and a dramatic swing in the relative average incomes of self-employed versus employed labour. Finally we turn to income distribution, showing a radical increase since the turn of the century in the dispersal of income, as a thriving self-employed elite pulled away from a poorly-paid mass.

2. The self-employed in New Zealand

New Zealand has a consistently higher self-employment rate than Australia and is at the high end of the rich-country data. Table 1 and Figure 1 set out four sets of estimates of the number of self-employed since 1936. One (drawn from Bertram and Rosenberg 2024) is calculated from 1939 to 1986 as a residual (by subtracting employees and unemployed from the total labour-force), and thereafter comes from the Household Labour Force Survey. The other three are drawn from census counts with linear interpolation between census years, and represent different definitions of who is included. The highest series shows the total of the three census categories ‘employers’, ‘self employed and without employees’, and ‘unpaid family workers’, and until 1981 includes all those working 20 hours per week or more, after which it includes all self-employed. Removing unpaid family workers gives a lower total. The third census-based series is for full-time self-employed, defined since 1986 as those working 30 hours or more per week. Since the distinction between full-time and total self-employed was introduced in the 1986 census there has been a growing divergence between the two, so that by 2023 the part-time self-employed were 25% of the total.

Figure 2 plots the top three series from Figure 1 (that include part-timers), along with the Peetz data mentioned above, as percentages of the total employed labour force, showing the fluctuating share of the self-employed. There are striking historical swings, but no long-term downward trend.

Three clear-cut periods are seen in Figure 1. In the first, running from 1939 to 1971, the number of self-employed fluctuated about 150,000 (with a dip attributable to war service in the 1940s). Meanwhile waged employment nearly doubled, driving down the self-employed percentage in Figure 2. The self-employed in this era were a relatively high-income group of farmers, professionals, and businesspeople.

The second era, beginning in the early 1970s but accelerating from 1981 to 1992, saw the number of self-employed double, from around 150,000 to over 300,000,¹ while waged employment flatlined between 1.1 million and 1.3 million. This was a period of high inflation and the emergence of mass unemployment, suggesting that self-employment provided a defensive alternative to unemployment for displaced workers in a growing labour force; as will be shown below, during this period the average income of the self-employed fell radically relative to that of waged labour, as the high-income farming, professional and commercial strata were joined by a rapidly growing low-income stratum.

Table 1. Labour-force and employment numbers, 1936–2024. Census years in bold type.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
	Total employed labour force	Employed wage and salary workers	Self- employed as residual, (1) minus (2)	Self- employed proportion of labour force: residual estimate	Employed labour force: census count	Census count of self- employed without employees	Census count of self- employed, with intercensal interpolation, excluding unpaid family	Self- employed proportion of labour force: census estimate excl unpaid family	Census count of unpaid family workers	Census count of self- employed, with intercensal interpolation, including unpaid family	Self- employed proportion of labour force: census estimate incl unpaid family	Full-time paid self- employed: census count with interpolation	Full-time self- employed proportion of total census count of self- employed
1936					642,857	58,540	73,696	132,236	11,820	144,056	22.4%		
1937					642,027	57,871	72,311	130,182	11,136	141,318	22.0%		
1938					641,196	57,202	70,926	128,129	10,452	138,581	21.6%		
1939	718,169	562,512	155,657	21.7%	640,366	56,534	69,542	126,075	9,768	135,843	21.2%		
1940	721,636	569,196	152,440	21.1%	639,536	55,865	68,157	124,022	9,084	133,106	20.8%		
1941	725,103	575,975	149,128	20.6%	638,705	55,196	66,772	121,968	8,400	130,368	20.4%		
1942	728,569	582,850	145,719	20.0%	637,875	54,527	65,387	119,915	7,716	127,631	20.0%		
1943	732,036	589,824	142,213	19.4%	637,045	53,859	64,003	117,861	7,032	124,893	19.6%		
1944	735,503	596,898	138,605	18.8%	636,214	53,190	62,618	115,808	6,348	122,156	19.2%		
1945	738,970	604,076	134,894	18.3%	635,384	52,521	61,233	113,754	5,664	119,418	18.8%		
1946	753,101	613,889	139,212	18.5%	652,903	55,351	64,181	119,532	5,256	124,788	19.1%		
1947	767,232	623,648	143,584	18.7%	670,421	58,182	67,128	125,310	4,847	130,157	19.4%		
1948	775,066	628,247	146,819	18.9%	687,940	61,012	70,076	131,088	4,439	135,527	19.7%		
1949	784,147	633,828	150,319	19.2%	705,459	63,842	73,023	136,865	4,031	140,896	20.0%		
1950	797,867	643,118	154,749	19.4%	722,977	66,673	75,971	142,643	3,622	146,266	20.2%		
1951	803,072	645,511	157,561	19.6%	740,496	69,503	78,918	148,421	3,214	151,635	20.5%		
1952	818,133	660,442	157,691	19.3%	755,767	70,172	79,153	149,325	3,020	152,346	20.2%		
1953	831,211	673,895	157,317	18.9%	771,038	70,841	79,389	150,229	2,827	153,056	19.9%		
1954	853,251	694,761	158,490	18.6%	786,310	71,509	79,624	151,134	2,633	153,767	19.6%		
1955	867,674	709,579	158,095	18.2%	801,581	72,178	79,860	152,038	2,440	154,477	19.3%		
1956	882,200	724,612	157,588	17.9%	816,852	72,847	80,095	152,942	2,246	155,188	19.0%		
1957	899,600	745,510	154,090	17.1%	832,554	71,662	77,657	149,319	2,174	151,494	18.2%		

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
Total employed labour force	Employed wage and salary workers	Self employed as residual, (1) minus (2)	Self- employed proportion of labour force: residual estimate	Employed labour force: census count	Census count of self- employed employees	Census count of self- employed without employees	Census count of self- employed, with intercensal interpolation, excluding unpaid family	Self- employed proportion of labour force: census estimate incl unpaid family	Census count of unpaid family workers	Census count of self- employed, with intercensal interpolation, including unpaid family	Self- employed proportion of labour force: census estimate incl unpaid family	Full-time paid self- employed: census count with interpolation	Full-time self- employed proportion of total census count of self- employed
1958 907,500	758,842	148,658	16.4%	848,256	70,477	75,220	145,697	17.2%	2,103	147,800	17.4%		
1959 932,200	786,593	145,607	15.6%	863,959	69,292	72,782	142,074	16.4%	2,031	144,105	16.7%		
1960 952,000	810,681	141,319	14.8%	879,661	68,107	70,345	138,452	15.7%	1,960	140,411	16.0%		
1961 976,700	839,427	137,273	14.1%	895,363	66,922	67,907	134,829	15.1%	1,888	136,717	15.3%		
1962 993,100	855,755	137,345	13.8%	915,498	68,222	68,292	136,514	14.9%	1,670	138,185	15.1%		
1963 1,012,200	874,500	137,700	13.6%	935,633	69,523	68,677	138,199	14.8%	1,453	139,652	14.9%		
1964 1,048,300	908,070	140,230	13.4%	955,769	70,823	69,061	139,885	14.6%	1,235	141,120	14.8%		
1965 1,084,000	941,470	142,530	13.1%	975,904	72,124	69,446	141,570	14.5%	1,018	142,587	14.6%		
1966 1,130,000	984,016	145,984	12.9%	996,039	73,424	69,831	143,255	14.4%	800	144,055	14.5%		
1967 1,150,100	1,004,523	145,577	12.7%	1,020,598	72,323	70,322	142,645	14.0%	761	143,405	14.1%		
1968 1,134,800	994,142	140,658	12.4%	1,045,157	71,222	70,813	142,035	13.6%	721	142,756	13.7%		
1969 1,164,400	1,023,151	141,249	12.1%	1,069,717	70,120	71,304	141,424	13.2%	682	142,106	13.3%		
1970 1,216,900	1,072,519	144,381	11.9%	1,094,276	69,019	71,795	140,814	12.9%	642	141,457	12.9%		
1971 1,252,400	1,107,159	145,241	11.6%	1,118,835	67,918	72,286	140,204	12.5%	603	140,807	12.6%		
1972 1,269,700	1,118,247	151,453	11.9%	1,149,535	71,032	76,131	147,163	12.8%	1,257	148,420	12.9%		
1973 1,314,500	1,153,382	161,118	12.3%	1,180,234	74,146	79,976	154,122	13.1%	1,912	156,033	13.2%		
1974 1,384,100	1,209,935	174,165	12.6%	1,210,934	77,259	83,821	161,080	13.3%	2,566	163,647	13.5%		
1975 1,412,400	1,230,100	182,300	12.9%	1,241,933	80,373	87,666	168,039	13.5%	3,221	171,260	13.8%		
1976 1,437,100	1,246,992	190,108	13.2%	1,272,333	83,487	91,511	174,998	13.8%	3,875	178,873	14.1%		
1977 1,455,100	1,263,468	191,632	13.2%	1,201,331	82,466	91,835	174,300	14.5%	4,386	178,687	14.9%		
1978 1,454,900	1,264,152	190,748	13.1%	1,130,329	81,445	92,158	173,603	15.4%	4,898	178,501	15.8%		
1979 1,480,300	1,287,096	193,204	13.1%	1,059,326	80,423	92,482	172,905	16.3%	5,409	178,314	16.8%		

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
Total employed labour force	Employed wage and salary workers	Self employed as residual, (1) minus (2)	Self- employed proportion of labour force: residual estimate	Employed labour force: census count	Census count of self- employed employees	Census count of self- employed without employees	Census count of self- employed, with interpolation, excluding unpaid family	Self- employed proportion of labour force: census estimate incl unpaid family	Census count of unpaid family workers	Census count of self- employed, with interpolation, including unpaid family	Self- employed proportion of labour force: census estimate incl unpaid family	Full-time paid self- employed: census count with interpolation	Full-time self- employed proportion of total census count of self- employed
1980	1,506,500	1,310,767	195,733	1,075,070	79,432	87,822	167,254	15.6%	4,283	171,537	16.0%		
1981	1,504,500	1,309,918	194,582	917,322	78,381	93,129	171,510	18.7%	6,432	177,942	19.4%		
1982	1,520,800	1,309,193	211,607	1,033,742	84,569	104,041	188,610	18.2%	8,768	197,378	19.1%		
1983	1,515,700	1,290,268	225,432	1,150,162	90,758	114,952	205,710	17.9%	11,104	216,814	18.9%		
1984	1,537,600	1,294,490	243,110	1,266,581	96,946	125,864	222,810	17.6%	13,441	236,251	18.7%		
1985	1,603,600	1,335,343	268,257	1,383,001	103,135	136,775	239,910	17.3%	15,777	255,687	18.5%		
1986	1,626,000	1,339,400	286,600	1,499,421	109,323	147,687	257,010	17.1%	18,113	275,123	18.3%	226,323	88.1%
1987	1,619,200	1,322,300	296,900	1,479,617	109,111	150,028	259,139	17.5%	18,187	277,326	18.7%	226,452	87.4%
1988	1,616,100	1,319,400	296,700	1,459,813	108,899	152,369	261,269	17.9%	18,260	279,529	19.1%	226,581	86.7%
1989	1,555,700	1,257,400	298,300	1,440,008	108,688	154,711	263,398	18.3%	18,334	281,732	19.6%	226,710	86.1%
1990	1,523,300	1,222,500	300,800	1,420,204	108,476	157,052	265,528	18.7%	18,407	283,935	20.0%	226,839	85.4%
1991	1,531,000	1,226,800	304,200	1,400,400	108,264	159,393	267,657	19.1%	18,481	286,138	20.4%	226,968	84.8%
1992	1,506,500	1,190,700	315,800	1,446,482	111,073	164,588	275,661	19.1%	25,587	301,248	20.8%	231,701	84.1%
1993	1,518,100	1,193,700	324,400	1,492,565	113,881	169,784	283,665	19.0%	32,692	316,357	21.2%	236,435	83.4%
1994	1,558,800	1,224,000	334,800	1,538,647	116,690	174,979	291,669	19.0%	39,798	331,467	21.5%	241,168	82.7%
1995	1,631,300	1,289,900	341,400	1,584,730	119,498	180,175	299,673	18.9%	46,903	346,576	21.9%	245,902	82.1%
1996	1,701,400	1,338,400	363,000	1,630,812	122,307	185,370	307,677	18.9%	54,009	361,686	22.2%	250,635	81.5%
1997	1,745,900	1,381,700	364,200	1,650,104	123,773	190,919	314,692	19.1%	51,066	365,758	22.2%	253,802	80.7%
1998	1,750,300	1,401,600	348,700	1,669,396	125,239	196,469	321,707	19.3%	48,123	369,830	22.2%	256,970	79.9%
1999	1,740,400	1,381,800	358,600	1,688,687	126,704	202,018	328,723	19.5%	45,180	373,903	22.1%	260,137	79.1%
2000	1,773,800	1,403,300	370,500	1,707,979	128,170	207,568	335,738	19.7%	42,237	377,975	22.1%	263,305	78.4%
2001	1,809,200	1,435,100	374,100	1,727,271	129,636	213,117	342,753	19.8%	39,294	382,047	22.1%	266,472	77.7%

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
Total employed labour force	Employed wage and salary workers	Self employed as residual, (1) minus (2)	Self- employed proportion of labour force: residual estimate	Employed labour force: census count	Census count of self- employed employers	Census count of self- employed without employees	Census count of self- employed, with intercensal interpolation, excluding unpaid family	Self- employed proportion of labour force: census estimate excl unpaid family	Census count of unpaid family workers	Census count of self- employed, with intercensal interpolation, including unpaid family	Self- employed proportion of labour force: census estimate incl unpaid family	Full-time paid self- employed: census count with interpolation	Full-time self- employed proportion of total census count of self- employed
2002	1,861,800	1,496,200	365,600	1,778,972	132,285	217,485	349,770	19.7%	39,349	389,119	21.9%	270,422	77.3%
2003	1,912,800	1,543,100	369,700	1,830,674	134,934	221,853	356,787	19.5%	39,403	396,190	21.6%	274,373	76.9%
2004	1,969,200	1,591,300	377,900	1,882,375	137,583	226,221	363,804	19.3%	39,458	403,262	21.4%	278,323	76.5%
2005	2,040,300	1,649,400	390,900	1,934,077	140,232	230,589	370,821	19.2%	39,512	410,333	21.2%	282,274	76.1%
2006	2,096,800	1,709,800	387,000	1,985,778	142,881	234,957	377,838	19.0%	39,567	417,405	21.0%	286,224	75.8%
2007	2,141,000	1,766,200	374,800	1,987,954	141,022	235,095	376,117	18.9%	39,303	415,420	20.9%	284,275	75.6%
2008	2,164,700	1,783,000	381,700	1,990,130	139,164	235,232	374,396	18.8%	39,039	413,435	20.8%	282,327	75.4%
2009	2,177,000	1,815,699	361,301	1,992,306	137,305	235,370	372,675	18.7%	38,775	411,450	20.7%	280,378	75.2%
2010	2,142,900	1,780,132	362,768	1,994,481	135,446	235,507	370,953	18.6%	38,511	409,464	20.5%	278,429	75.1%
2011	2,162,400	1,790,328	372,072	1,996,657	133,587	235,645	369,232	18.5%	38,247	407,479	20.4%	276,480	74.9%
2012	2,188,400	1,811,662	376,738	1,998,833	131,729	235,782	367,511	18.4%	37,983	405,494	20.3%	274,532	74.7%
2013	2,180,600	1,806,696	373,904	2,001,009	129,870	235,920	365,790	18.3%	37,719	403,509	20.2%	272,583	74.5%
2014	2,245,600	1,860,490	385,110	2,089,835	131,438	238,748	370,186	17.7%	37,370	407,555	19.5%	276,487	74.7%
2015	2,329,100	1,934,092	395,008	2,178,662	133,006	241,576	374,581	17.2%	37,021	411,602	18.9%	280,390	74.9%
2016	2,381,900	1,983,677	398,223	2,267,488	134,573	244,403	378,977	16.7%	36,671	415,648	18.3%	284,294	75.0%
2017	2,518,300	2,097,183	421,117	2,356,315	136,141	247,231	383,372	16.3%	36,322	419,695	17.8%	288,197	75.2%
2018	2,605,300	2,184,832	420,468	2,445,141	137,709	250,059	387,768	15.9%	35,973	423,741	17.3%	292,101	75.3%
2019	2,661,900	2,225,140	436,760	2,480,657	137,800	257,282	395,082	15.9%	35,473	430,555	17.4%	297,331	75.3%
2020	2,712,500	2,262,866	449,634	2,516,174	137,890	264,506	402,396	16.0%	34,972	437,368	17.4%	302,561	75.2%
2021	2,730,700	2,263,409	467,291	2,551,690	137,981	271,729	409,710	16.1%	34,472	444,182	17.4%	307,792	75.1%
2022	2,806,900	2,325,093	481,807	2,587,207	138,071	278,953	417,024	16.1%	33,971	450,995	17.4%	313,022	75.1%
2023	2,857,800	2,396,009	461,791	2,622,723	138,162	286,176	424,338	16.2%	33,471	457,809	17.5%	318,252	75.0%
2024	2,937,600	2,479,563	458,037										

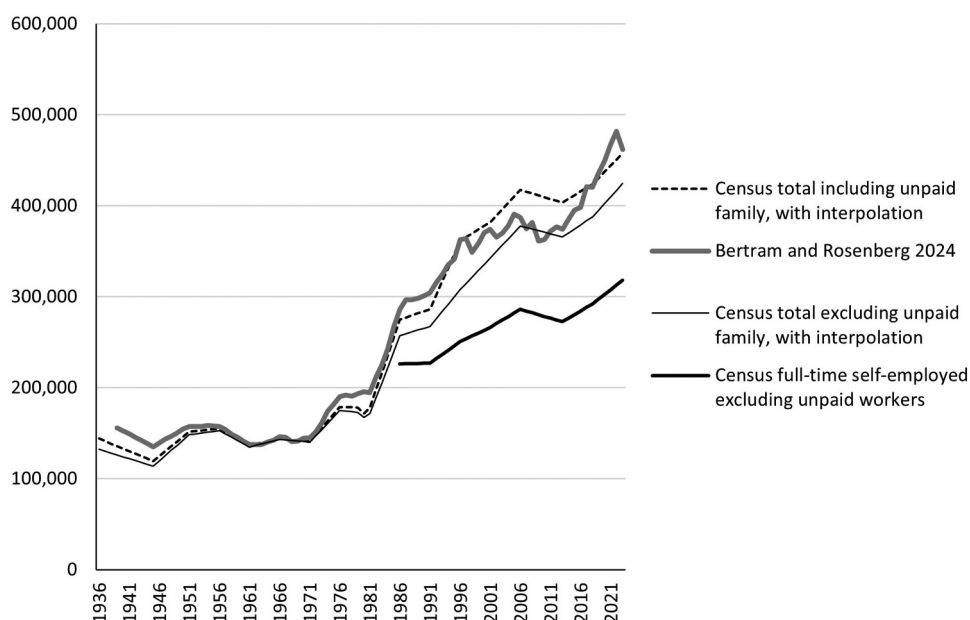


Figure 1. Various measures of the number of self-employed. Source: Table 1, and Bertram and Rosenberg (2024) Table 5.

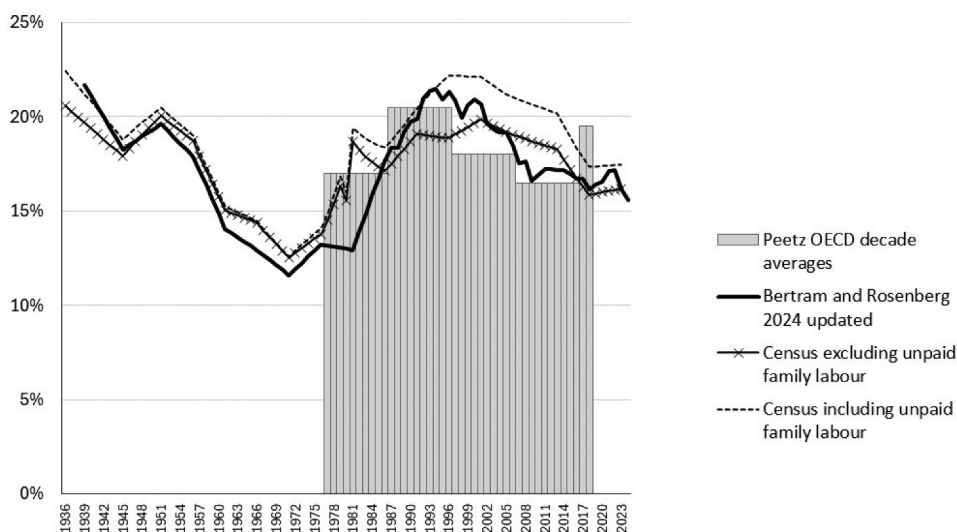


Figure 2. Self-employed percentage of total employed New Zealand labour force. Source Table 1, Peetz (2023) Figure 32 p.20, and Bertram and Rosenberg (2024) Table 5.

The third era, covering the three decades to 2024, was again a period of gradual decline in the percentage of self-employed: their numbers grew by over 100,000 but waged employment rose faster.

Figure 3 shows the three work-status categories of people included in the self-employed totals. The number of working proprietors (owners of mainly small businesses

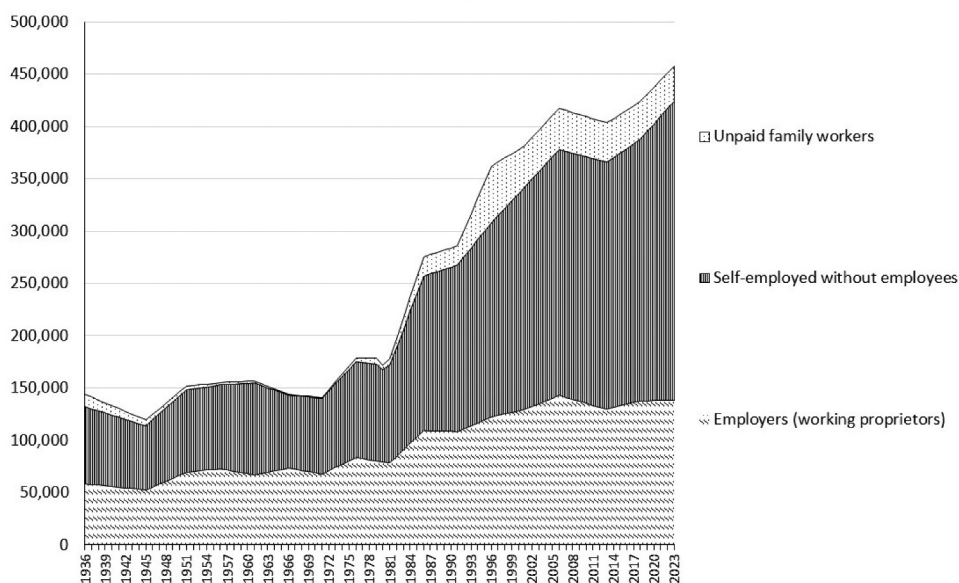


Figure 3. Number of self-employed by type 1936-2023: census counts, interpolated between census years. Source: [Table 1](#).

with waged employees) rose fairly steadily over the period, but the rapid growth in self-employment since the 1980s has been concentrated in self-employed operating on their own without employees, plus a significant cohort of unpaid family workers. This is consistent with anecdotal evidence of a growing ‘precariat’ among both waged workers and self-employed.

The industry structure of self-employment changed dramatically over the years 1939–2024 as agriculture and trade fell and other service industries rose. [Figure 4](#) shows the distribution of self-employed individuals (excluding unpaid family workers) across industries.

The big changes over the 87 years in [Figure 4](#) are the declining share of agriculture, forestry and fishing, and the rising share of construction, business services, real estate, and other services. In the late 1930s, two-thirds of the self-employed were in agriculture and wholesale or retail trade, restaurants and hotels – farmers, shopkeepers and hospitality – with roughly another 15% in manufacturing and construction. By the early 2020s agriculture and trade represented less than a quarter of the total while services (transport and communications, finance, real estate, business and other services) had risen from 15% to half.

The decline of agriculture, forestry and fishing self-employment relative to the total is noteworthy because these industries are most obviously the ones in which the mode of production has departed most dramatically from the familiar capitalist wage-labour model. As [Figure 5](#) shows, throughout the twentieth century the self-employed were over half of the total labour force in these primary-production industries, that were the major source of the economy’s exports – a feature that underpinned Franklin’s (1969) description of New Zealand as a ‘self-employed society’. Even after three decades of

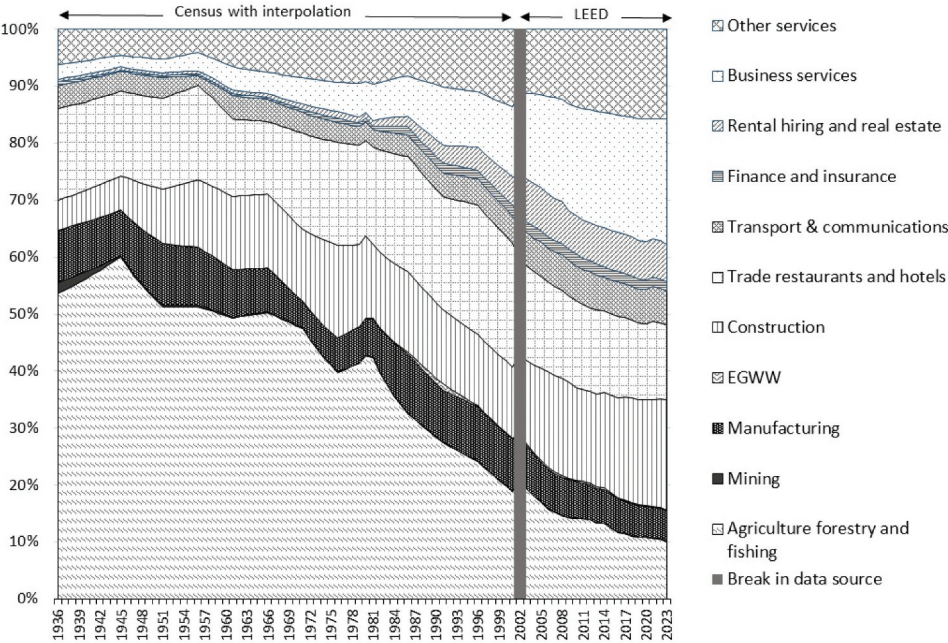


Figure 4. Self-employed persons by industry, 1936-2023. Source: Table 2.

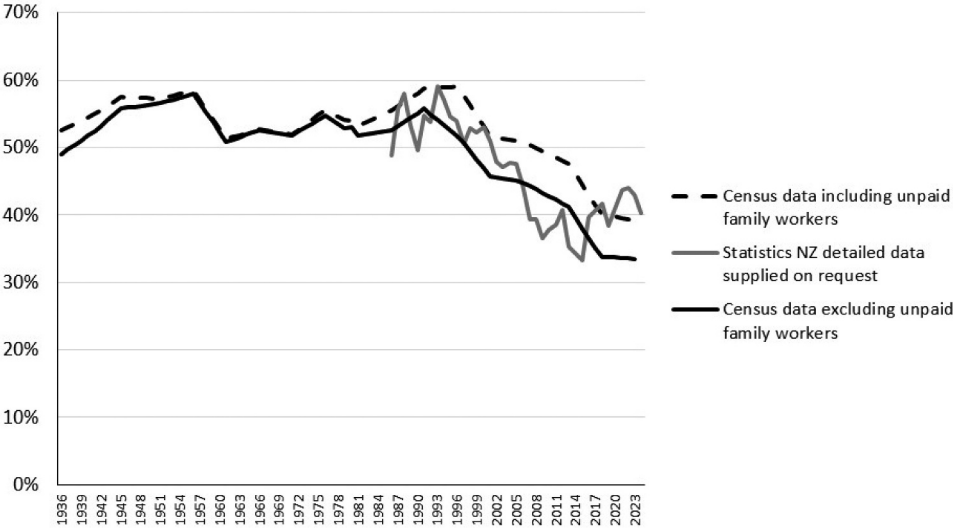


Figure 5. Proportion of self-employed in total workforce in agriculture, forestry and fishing.

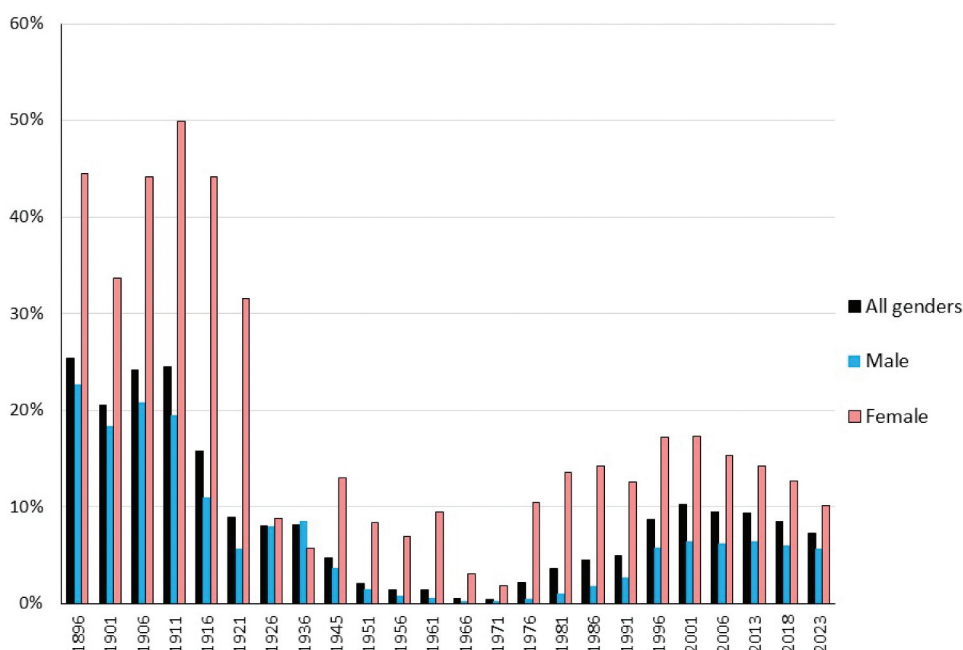


Figure 6. Unpaid family workers as % of total self employed: census data. Sources: *New Zealand Official Yearbook 2000* p.319 for years to 1996; census tables thereafter.

transition from self-employment to wage labour, the self-employed were still 40% of the total in 2024.

Unpaid family workers are included in the census definition of the self-employed, and [Figure 6](#) (covering a longer period than [Figures 1–5](#), starting in 1896) shows them falling from a quarter of the total in the early twentieth century to a negligible level by 1971, before rising again to 10% by 2001 and then drifting back to 7% in 2023. For females, the ratio of unpaid family workers to total female self-employed is much higher: 50% in 1911, 2% at the low point in 1971, then 17% in 2001 and still 10% in 2023. While meeting the census definition of self-employment, many of these individuals will in fact have been working for spouses or relatives on an unpaid basis and in some international classifications are included among ‘dependent workers’.

[Figure 7](#) shows the rate of self-employment as percentages of the total employed workforce by industry. At the top is agriculture, forestry and fishing, followed by rental hiring and real estate, which jumps abruptly in the 1980s due probably to the emergence of a class of independent landlords (but also a boom in real estate trading). Construction, manufacturing, and transport and communications, similarly rise sharply in the 1980s, probably reflecting displacement of tradespeople from waged employment at a time of rising unemployment, corporatisation of government functions, and privatisation. At the bottom, ‘electricity gas water and waste’ was predominantly waged employment until the mid-1980s, after which corporatisation and privatisation led to increased use of self-employed consultants. Finance and insurance similarly increased the rate of self-employment at the same time.

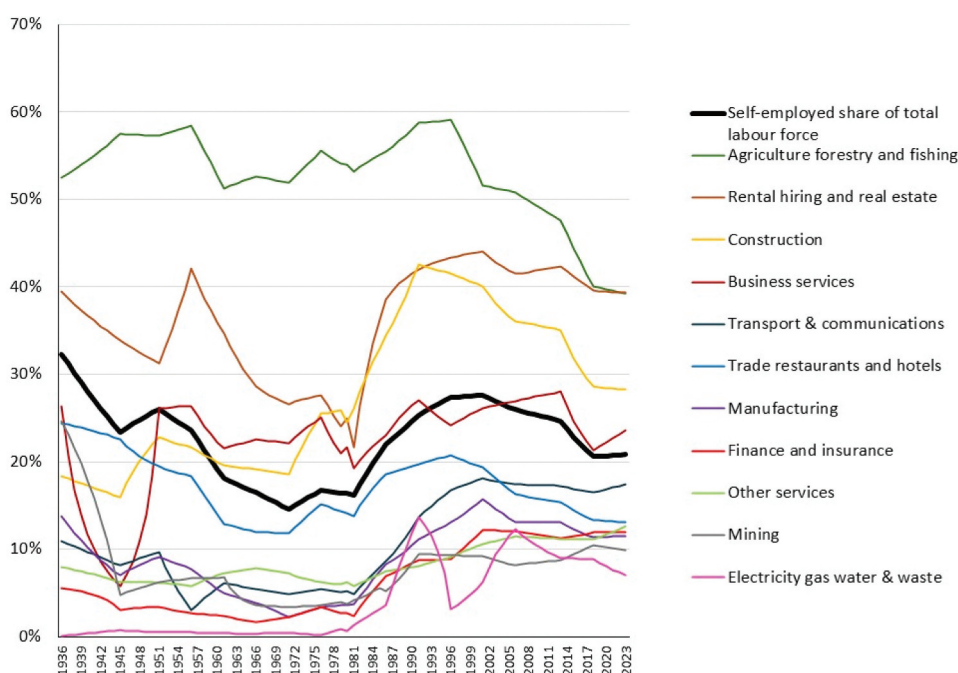


Figure 7. Self-employed percent of workforce in each industry.

3. Mixed income in the overall distribution of the total product

In the modern System of National Accounts (SNA) the income of the self-employed is termed ‘mixed income’, and is rolled into the general measure of gross economic surplus. That surplus itself is an undifferentiated mixture of profit and rent, calculated as the residual remaining after all costs of intermediate inputs and wage-labour have been deducted from the total value-added product at factor cost. Table 3 sets out our construction of a series for total Gross Mixed Income from 1939 to 2023, and Table 4 presents estimates of the industry composition of GMI from 1950 on. Detailed source notes are in the Supplementary Data. From 1950 to 1976, the industry numbers have been constructed by scaling up detailed but evidently incomplete numbers on self-employed income drawn from the old income tax statistics and Official Yearbooks, which we have scaled to match the total GMI series derived from the national accounts and Grindell (1981) in Table 3. From 1977 on we use detailed industry series provided on request by Statistics New Zealand, with some adjustments, along with data from Statistics New Zealand (1997, 1999).

Using these data, Figure 8 shows the industry breakdown of gross mixed income, and Figure 9 shows a clear hierarchy of mixed income per head of the self-employed, converted to 2024 dollars using the Consumer Price Index. Average gross mixed income fell steeply in real terms during the 1980s and 1990s, and the recovery since 2000 has been confined to just two broadly-defined industries – agriculture-forestry-fishing, and FIRE. (The steep rise in agriculture, forestry and fishing reflects the increasingly capital-intensive and debt-financed character of this industry rather than necessarily an increase



Table 2. Number of paid self-employed by industry, excluding unpaid family workers.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
	Agriculture forestry and fishing	Mining	Manufact- uring	Electricity gas water and waste services	Construction	Trade restaurants and hotels	Transport & communications	Finance and insurance	Rental hiring and real estate	Business services	Other services	n.e.c	Total
1936	70,922	2,401	12,281	5	6,888	21,192	5,456	766	616	3,487	8,117	105	132,236
1937	70,453	2,167	11,898	9	6,864	20,670	5,281	698	620	3,354	7,777	391	130,182
1938	69,985	1,934	11,515	12	6,840	20,148	5,106	629	624	3,222	7,436	677	128,129
1939	69,516	1,700	11,131	16	6,817	19,626	4,931	561	628	3,089	7,096	964	126,075
1940	69,048	1,467	10,748	20	6,793	19,104	4,756	492	632	2,956	6,756	1,250	124,022
1941	68,579	1,233	10,365	23	6,769	18,583	4,582	424	636	2,824	6,415	1,536	121,968
1942	68,111	1,000	9,982	27	6,745	18,061	4,407	355	640	2,691	6,075	1,822	119,915
1943	67,642	766	9,598	31	6,722	17,539	4,232	287	644	2,558	5,735	2,108	117,861
1944	67,174	533	9,215	34	6,698	17,017	4,057	218	647	2,426	5,394	2,394	115,808
1945	66,705	299	8,832	38	6,674	16,495	3,882	150	651	2,293	5,054	2,681	113,754
1946	68,146	329	10,025	39	7,911	17,630	4,143	209	655	2,496	5,504	2,447	119,532
1947	69,587	359	11,217	39	9,149	18,764	4,403	268	659	2,698	5,953	2,213	125,310
1948	71,028	389	12,410	40	10,386	19,899	4,664	328	663	2,901	6,403	1,979	131,088
1949	72,469	419	13,602	40	11,623	21,033	4,925	387	667	3,103	6,852	1,746	136,865
1950	73,910	449	14,795	41	12,861	22,168	5,185	446	671	3,306	7,302	1,512	142,643
1951	75,351	479	15,987	41	14,098	23,302	5,446	505	675	3,508	7,751	1,278	148,421
1952	75,326	481	15,751	42	14,755	23,523	4,842	504	691	3,754	7,394	2,262	149,325
1953	75,301	483	15,515	43	15,412	23,745	4,238	503	707	4,000	7,037	3,245	150,229
1954	75,277	486	15,278	45	16,068	23,966	3,634	501	724	4,245	6,681	4,229	151,134
1955	75,252	488	15,042	46	16,725	24,188	3,030	500	740	4,491	6,324	5,212	152,038
1956	75,227	490	14,806	47	17,382	24,409	2,426	499	756	4,737	5,967	6,196	152,942
1957	73,132	424	14,040	47	17,261	23,096	3,033	499	763	4,851	6,510	9,668	153,323
1958	71,037	358	13,273	46	17,140	21,783	3,640	499	769	4,966	7,053	13,140	153,705
1959	68,942	293	12,507	46	17,020	20,471	4,247	498	776	5,080	7,596	16,611	154,086
1960	66,847	227	11,740	45	16,899	19,158	4,854	498	782	5,195	8,139	20,083	154,468
1961	64,752	161	10,974	45	16,778	17,845	5,461	498	789	5,309	8,682	23,555	154,849

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
1962	65,826	174	10,902	45	17,040	17,831	5,433	492	811	5,298	9,059	19,617	152,530
1963	66,900	187	10,831	46	17,303	17,818	5,406	486	833	5,286	9,436	15,680	150,211
1964	67,973	201	10,759	46	17,565	17,804	5,378	479	856	5,275	9,814	11,742	147,893
1965	69,047	214	10,688	47	17,828	17,791	5,351	473	878	5,263	10,191	7,805	145,574
1966	70,121	227	10,616	47	18,090	17,777	5,323	467	900	5,252	10,568	3,867	143,255
1967	69,081	217	9,758	51	17,918	18,855	5,255	518	965	5,488	10,779	3,760	142,645
1968	68,041	207	8,901	55	17,746	19,933	5,187	570	1,029	5,723	10,990	3,653	142,035
1969	67,001	197	8,043	59	17,574	21,012	5,118	621	1,094	5,959	11,201	3,545	141,424
1970	65,961	187	7,186	63	17,402	22,090	5,050	673	1,158	6,194	11,412	3,438	140,814
1971	64,921	177	6,328	67	17,230	23,168	4,982	724	1,223	6,430	11,623	3,331	140,204
1972	65,707	178	7,114	59	19,410	24,805	5,179	830	1,412	6,894	12,529	3,047	147,163
1973	66,493	178	7,900	50	21,590	26,442	5,376	935	1,601	7,359	13,434	2,763	154,122
1974	67,279	179	8,686	42	23,771	28,078	5,573	1,041	1,791	7,823	14,340	2,478	161,080
1975	68,065	179	9,472	33	25,951	29,715	5,770	1,146	1,980	8,288	15,245	2,194	168,039
1976	68,851	180	10,258	25	28,131	31,352	5,967	1,252	2,169	8,752	16,151	1,910	174,998
1977	69,204	182	10,383	64	26,833	30,749	5,803	1,203	2,066	9,107	16,145	2,561	174,300
1978	69,556	184	10,507	104	25,535	30,146	5,639	1,154	1,964	9,462	16,138	3,212	173,603
1979	69,909	185	10,632	143	24,238	29,544	5,476	1,106	1,861	9,817	16,132	3,864	172,905
1980	69,810	193	10,579	108	23,527	27,431	5,511	997	1,710	8,762	15,022	3,604	167,254
1981	70,614	189	10,881	222	21,642	28,338	5,148	1,008	1,656	10,527	16,119	5,166	171,510
1982	72,470	211	13,793	313	24,196	32,581	5,965	1,514	2,251	11,879	16,908	6,530	188,610
1983	74,326	236	16,705	403	26,750	36,824	6,782	2,021	2,845	13,231	17,696	7,891	205,710
1984	76,181	260	19,617	494	29,304	41,068	7,600	2,527	3,440	14,582	18,485	9,252	222,810
1985	78,037	285	22,529	584	31,858	45,311	8,417	3,034	4,034	15,934	19,273	10,613	239,910
1986	79,893	300	25,441	675	34,412	49,554	9,234	3,540	4,629	17,286	20,062	11,984	257,010
1987	78,714	322	25,264	1,131	34,544	50,339	9,625	3,785	5,352	19,381	21,484	9,198	259,139
1988	77,535	343	25,088	1,587	34,676	51,124	10,016	4,031	6,075	21,476	22,906	6,412	261,269
1989	76,356	365	24,911	2,043	34,809	51,908	10,408	4,276	6,798	23,572	24,327	3,625	263,398
1990	75,177	386	24,735	2,499	34,941	52,693	10,799	4,522	7,521	25,667	25,749	839	265,528

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
1991	73,998	408	24,558	2,955	35,073	53,478	11,190	4,767	8,244	27,762	27,171	-1,947	267,657
1992	73,370	391	25,258	2,417	35,410	56,098	11,658	4,693	8,967	27,940	28,136	1,324	275,661
1993	72,741	373	25,958	1,880	35,746	58,717	12,126	4,619	9,690	28,118	29,101	4,595	283,665
1994	72,113	356	26,659	1,342	36,083	61,337	12,594	4,546	10,413	28,295	30,065	7,867	291,669
1995	71,484	338	27,359	805	36,419	63,956	13,062	4,472	11,136	28,473	31,030	11,138	299,673
1996	70,856	321	28,059	267	36,756	66,576	13,530	4,398	11,859	28,651	31,995	14,409	307,677
1997	68,716	314	28,250	286	37,406	67,051	13,920	4,737	12,582	30,774	34,302	16,354	314,692
1998	66,576	308	28,441	305	38,056	67,525	14,310	5,076	13,305	32,897	36,609	18,300	321,707
1999	64,436	301	28,631	325	38,705	68,000	14,699	5,415	14,028	35,021	38,916	20,245	328,723
2000	62,296	295	28,822	344	39,355	68,474	15,089	5,754	14,751	37,144	41,223	22,191	335,738
2001	60,156	288	29,013	363	40,005	68,949	15,479	6,093	15,474	39,267	43,530	24,136	342,753
2002	76,550	230	26,960	970	50,710	58,700	20,340	6,440	25,970	51,560	39,440	18,560	376,430
2003	69,950	220	27,080	950	53,100	59,840	21,130	6,930	26,850	54,330	40,600	18,930	379,910
2004	66,090	230	26,590	950	56,570	59,910	21,190	7,230	27,710	57,680	41,510	19,370	385,030
2005	62,990	240	25,930	940	59,550	58,950	22,300	7,180	28,010	59,960	42,210	19,610	387,870
2006	58,690	250	25,650	930	62,220	58,450	21,750	7,290	28,050	63,640	43,550	19,820	390,290
2007	57,120	270	25,470	940	63,770	58,700	22,370	7,640	27,970	66,080	45,190	19,430	394,950
2008	55,490	280	25,160	960	64,680	58,300	23,290	7,630	27,840	67,730	46,450	19,710	397,520
2009	52,470	290	24,370	1,070	61,770	56,140	22,470	7,250	24,850	69,070	48,180	20,070	388,000
2010	51,940	310	23,510	910	59,520	55,820	22,420	7,290	25,000	69,510	50,040	18,380	384,650
2011	53,280	320	23,410	930	60,860	56,540	22,820	7,500	25,160	73,890	52,530	15,970	393,210
2012	53,230	350	23,200	920	61,370	56,250	24,150	7,710	25,350	75,640	53,870	15,110	397,150
2013	51,150	380	23,230	930	62,830	56,360	23,960	7,370	25,700	77,360	55,260	14,610	399,140
2014	52,280	420	23,220	930	65,960	56,810	22,850	7,550	26,710	80,050	57,170	14,630	408,580
2015	50,360	430	23,500	980	68,810	57,410	23,440	7,400	27,290	82,530	59,460	14,700	416,310
2016	47,270	400	23,570	1,020	71,380	57,940	24,280	7,370	28,030	83,440	61,340	15,320	421,360
2017	48,730	390	23,900	990	75,940	59,020	25,230	7,610	29,340	87,110	64,850	12,620	435,730
2018	46,430	400	23,430	970	76,760	57,390	24,780	7,430	29,170	87,610	64,910	12,130	431,410
2019	47,090	400	23,860	970	80,090	58,490	26,170	7,660	29,620	93,270	68,310	13,920	449,850

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
2020	47,820	420	23,570	960	81,320	58,570	26,960	7,620	29,810	94,460	69,490	17,880	458,880
2021	46,860	420	23,810	970	82,500	60,690	26,720	7,630	29,990	92,700	69,400	19,210	460,900
2022	47,190	420	23,980	960	85,020	60,330	26,740	7,540	30,470	95,930	70,390	20,170	469,140
2023	44,040	400	23,030	980	84,680	57,310	25,560	7,220	28,740	95,830	69,080	20,840	457,710

Table 3. Derivation of a series for Gross mixed income, \$million.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
	Household entrepreneurial income (net)							Gross mixed income			
	Old National Accounts	Grindell	B series SNA accounts	Current SNA accounts	Net mixed income	Non-corporate consumption of fixed capital	Gross mixed income of market non-financial business enterprises	Gross mixed income: business enterprises, all control, table SNE2002AA	Non-corporate GMI	Corporate GMI	Total Gross Mixed Income
1939	112				115	8			123		123
1940	119				122	9			132		132
1941	115				118	8			127		127
1942	120				123	8			132		132
1943	129				133	8			141		141
1944	134				138	8			146		146
1945	145				149	9			158		158
1946	168				173	10			183		183
1947	196				202	13			215		215
1948	233				240	15			255		255
1949	245				252	15			267		267
1950	295				304	17			320		320
1951	452				465	22			484		487
1952	372				383	21			398		403
1953	400				412	22			425		433
1954	445				458	25			470		482
1955	462				475	28			487		503
1956	462				475	29			484		504
1957	512				527	30			531		557
1958	567				584	30			581		613
1959	522				537	34			538		572
1960	561	551			577	36			574		614
1961	609	581			609	41			603		650
1962	586	515			540	43			537		583

(Continued)



Table 3. (Continued).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
	Household entrepreneurial income (net)							Gross mixed income			
	Old National Accounts	Grindell	B series SNA accounts	Current SNA accounts	Net mixed income	Non-corporate consumption of fixed capital	Gross mixed income of market non-financial business enterprises	Gross mixed income: business enterprises, all control, table SNE2002AA	Non-corporate GMI	Corporate GMI	Total Gross Mixed Income
1963	623	591			619	50			612		669
1964	691	667			699	54			684		753
1965	719	694			727	58			708		785
1966	748	725			760	62			736		821
1967	720	656			687	66			669		753
1968	717	659			691	68			669		758
1969	714	656			687	73			666		760
1970	766	725			760	80			729		839
1971	810	765			802	80			760		881
1972	1,017	1,009	946		1,057	238			1,109		1,295
1973	1,277	1,324	1,213		1,356	305			1,411		1,661
1974	1,398	1,472	1,348		1,507	339			1,556		1,845
1975	1,262	1,248	1,136		1,270	286			1,301		1,555
1976	1,565	1,525	1,523		1,702	383			1,731		2,085
1977	1,851	1,919	1,926		2,152	362			2,171		2,637
1978		1,870	1,876		2,097	430			2,098		2,568
1979		2,359	2,074		2,318	477			2,301		2,839
1980			2,677		2,992	554			2,946		3,665
1981			2,755		3,079	619			3,007		3,772
1982			3,246		3,628	734			3,514		4,444
1983			3,471		3,879	844			3,727		4,752
1984			3,944		4,408	886			4,199		5,399
1985			4,688		5,239	992			4,949		6,418
1986			4,976		5,561	1,174			5,209		6,812

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
	Household entrepreneurial income (net)							Gross mixed income			
Old National Accounts	Grindell	B series SNA accounts	Current SNA accounts	Net mixed income	Non-corporate consumption of fixed capital	Gross mixed income of market non-financial business enterprises	Gross mixed income: business enterprises, all control, table SNE2002AA	market financial	Non-corporate	Corporate	Total
								infoshare	corporate	GMI	Gross Mixed Income
1987		5,393	5,212	6,027	1,356				5,597	1,786	7,383
1988		6,663	6,504	7,408	1,445				6,907	1,946	8,853
1989		7,399	7,230	8,227	1,469				8,030	1,666	9,696
1990		8,116	7,955	8,839	1,548				7,934	2,453	10,387
1991		7,421	7,203	8,215	1,626				7,307	2,534	9,841
1992		8,142	7,895	8,775	1,703				7,898	2,580	10,478
1993		7,943	7,660	8,393	1,780				7,769	2,404	10,173
1994		9,012	8,735	9,414	1,862				8,527	2,749	11,276
1995		9,794	9,445	10,312	1,957				9,210	3,059	12,269
1996		10,899	10,299	11,246	2,073				9,827	3,492	13,319
1997		11,072	10,235	11,522	2,171				9,968	3,725	13,693
1998		11,011	10,645	24,291	2,221				10,571	3,923	26,512
1999		11,539	11,292	44,469	2,271	15,550	208		11,522	4,236	15,758
2000			13,060	44,424	2,316	16,883	191		12,599	4,475	17,074
2001			13,810	44,219	2,521	17,912	189		13,664	4,437	18,101
2002			14,869	44,101	2,639	19,624	243		14,645	5,221	19,866
2003			13,622	44,042	2,698	17,585	253		12,736	5,102	17,838
2004			15,360	43,917	2,823	19,167	226		13,606	5,787	19,393
2005			15,466	43,655	3,085	19,644	261		13,726	6,179	19,905
2006			14,929	43,434	3,306	19,341	279		13,198	6,422	19,620
2007			16,844	43,133	3,607	20,979	300		14,244	7,036	21,280
2008			19,971	42,894	3,846	23,910	285		15,845	8,350	24,195
2009			15,934	42,519	4,221	21,818	240		14,933	7,125	22,058
2010			17,685	42,512	4,228	23,928	229		16,495	7,662	24,157

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
	Household entrepreneurial income (net)										
	Old National Accounts	Grindell	B series SNA accounts	Current SNA accounts	Net mixed income	Non-corporate consumption of fixed capital	Gross mixed income of market non-financial business enterprises	Gross mixed income: business enterprises, all control, table SNE2002AA	Non-corporate GMI	Corporate GMI	Total Gross Mixed Income
2011				20,397	42,585	4,155	26,382	248	17,626	9,003	26,629
2012				21,910	42,783	3,957	28,918	239	19,641	9,516	29,157
2013				19,789	42,820	3,920	25,953	272	16,881	9,345	26,226
2014				24,455	42,804	3,936	31,134	330	18,365	13,099	31,464
2015				21,657	42,807	3,933	28,054	358	17,437	10,975	28,412
2016				22,493	42,583	4,157	29,034	328	17,968	11,394	29,362
2017				27,933	42,535	4,205	34,578	345	20,264	14,657	34,921
2018				29,978	42,329	4,411	36,760	364	21,111	16,012	37,123
2019				31,680	41,923	4,817	38,670	533	22,353	16,850	39,203
2020				34,875	42,029	4,711	41,886	378	23,702	18,559	42,261
2021				38,690	41,762	4,978	43,796	542	24,417	19,920	44,337
2022				43,673	41,231	5,509	48,745	435	26,827	22,352	49,179
2023				39,053	46,740		46,299	441	25,748	20,991	46,739
2024				39,857				503			

**Table 4.** Estimated Gross mixed income of the self-employed, by industry, 1950–2022, \$million.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	
AA Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	BB Mining	CC Manufacturing	DD Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	EE Construction	FF-GH Wholesale Trade Retail Trade and Accommodation	II-JJ Transport, Postal and Warehousing Information Media and Telecommunications	KK Financial and Insurance Services	LL Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services excl OOP	MN Professional, Scientific, Technical, Administrative and Support Services	KK-MN FIRE: Finance, Rental, Real Estate and Business Services	OO-RS Other Services	Total	
1950	201.2	0.9	14.1	0.0	18.4	33.9	9.5	0.00	17.74	11.36	29.10	13.28	320
1951	333.8	1.8	17.4	0.2	25.7	41.4	11.6	0.00	21.53	16.60	38.13	17.07	487
1952	253.3	1.6	15.7	0.1	26.5	40.7	12.4	0.00	18.38	17.54	35.93	17.13	403
1953	279.1	1.4	16.4	0.1	29.2	41.4	12.1	0.30	18.62	17.42	36.34	17.46	433
1954	314.5	1.6	17.8	0.0	33.8	41.8	13.2	0.41	19.42	21.15	40.98	18.81	482
1955	324.3	1.6	16.8	0.0	38.0	44.6	14.6	0.46	20.59	23.07	44.11	19.41	503
1956	309.0	1.6	17.3	0.0	42.0	48.0	15.6	1.43	23.07	25.23	49.73	20.85	504
1957	352.7	1.6	17.1	0.0	42.8	52.1	15.7	0.95	23.75	29.13	53.83	21.25	557
1958	365.9	2.0	20.6	0.0	53.5	59.3	18.7	0.86	29.90	35.50	66.26	27.25	613
1959	332.4	1.5	19.5	0.0	48.2	59.7	18.3	1.41	31.14	33.41	65.96	26.04	572
1960	360.5	1.5	23.4	0.1	52.8	63.0	20.2	3.14	31.43	34.20	68.77	23.37	614
1961	369.7	1.8	26.0	0.1	59.8	66.5	22.4	3.99	33.48	39.54	77.01	26.46	650
1962	311.3	0.0	26.5	0.0	61.8	66.7	21.9	3.63	26.92	38.82	69.36	25.36	583
1963	360.1	1.4	27.9	0.1	67.1	72.6	22.2	3.87	39.46	44.53	87.86	29.56	669
1964	418.7	1.6	31.5	0.2	69.1	75.4	25.8	4.92	41.93	49.79	96.63	34.03	753
1965	430.7	1.6	33.7	0.2	74.2	78.4	26.9	6.65	44.61	53.23	104.49	34.66	785
1966	451.9	1.8	35.1	0.2	80.0	76.0	27.5	6.55	51.09	53.34	110.98	38.12	821
1967	389.8	1.3	33.9	0.3	75.3	71.6	24.9	6.15	47.42	59.18	112.75	43.14	753
1968	395.6	1.4	31.9	0.2	74.7	70.6	22.0	8.00	50.87	63.44	122.31	39.50	758
1969	392.4	1.2	32.6	0.1	75.6	65.3	22.2	6.92	54.47	69.73	131.12	39.66	760
1970	429.3	0.4	35.3	0.1	85.6	68.9	25.7	7.61	62.88	78.97	149.46	44.30	839
1971	436.9	0.5	39.6	0.1	90.4	68.3	27.1	11.08	70.05	87.40	168.52	49.91	881
1972	666.7	0.6	54.7	0.0	132.0	90.7	39.1	18.68	100.02	129.81	248.50	62.66	1,295

(Continued)

(Continued)



Table 4. (Continued).

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
AA Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	BB Mining	CC Manufacturing	DD Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	EE Construction	FF-GH Wholesale Trade Retail Trade and Accommodation	II-JJ Transport, Postal and Warehousing Information Media and Telecommunications	KK Financial and Insurance Services	LL Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services excl OOP	MN Professional, Scientific, Technical, Administrative and Support Services	KK-MN FIRE: Finance, Rental, Real Estate and Business Services	OO-RS Other Services	Total
1973	918.6	0.8	57.0	157.3	101.2	43.2	20.90	119.37	159.41	299.69	82.82	1,661
1974	946.7	1.2	69.1	199.5	126.2	49.6	21.73	145.61	193.46	360.80	92.25	1,845
1975	687.9	1.0	63.8	200.4	126.3	46.1	14.14	108.42	212.1	334.63	94.87	1,555
1976	954.9	1.0	54.2	258.5	187.5	66.4	12.96	72.49	230.67	316.11	246.42	2,085
1977	1,209.7	2.3	79.4	223.6	364.7	86.5	16.9	186.6	224.5	428.1	239.42	2,637
1978	1,058.2	3.0	94.0	227.6	388.2	99.3	15.7	173.4	244.7	433.8	260.75	2,568
1979	1,187.7	3.7	103.5	232.1	409.9	110.7	17.7	195.4	281.8	494.9	293.02	2,839
1980	1,839.6	4.6	118.3	236.3	448.5	132.5	20.5	226.3	319.0	565.8	315.36	3,665
1981	1,684.0	5.3	159.8	276.7	487.6	137.9	23.9	263.7	368.0	655.6	360.11	3,772
1982	1,835.9	5.8	207.1	431.0	539.2	160.0	31.7	349.2	461.0	841.9	417.44	4,444
1983	1,795.4	5.5	276.2	484.5	607.6	183.3	33.2	365.6	520.6	919.4	473.76	4,752
1984	1,931.9	5.7	327.9	535.2	672.9	202.3	47.2	520.1	630.0	1,197.3	519.40	5,399
1985	2,330.5	6.7	371.9	692.0	719.0	223.4	62.5	688.6	748.7	1,499.8	567.16	6,418
1986	1,894.6	7.8	473.1	830.4	847.3	267.1	74.3	819.0	908.7	1,802.0	681.05	6,812
1987	2,306.6	6.9	547.0	981.1	992.0	328.8	19.0	209.3	1,151.3	1,379.7	830.36	7,383
1988	2,547.4	6.6	662.6	1,056.9	1,075.5	411.7	56.5	622.9	1,415.4	2,094.7	984.89	8,853
1989	2,671.9	15.3	552.7	852.7	840.5	344.3	169.9	1,873.5	1,475.4	3,518.8	888.10	9,696
1990	2,107.2	13.4	761.3	883.7	1,219.6	380.9	217.7	2,399.9	1,461.8	4,079.3	929.77	10,387
1991	2,505.6	20.2	744.9	743.1	1,299.0	423.3	128.8	1,419.7	1,510.2	3,058.6	1,033.14	9,841
1992	2,385.1	17.8	714.5	668.7	1,298.2	422.6	204.3	2,252.5	1,444.3	3,901.2	1,056.27	10,478
1993	2,709.2	20.9	738.0	696.2	1,371.5	385.5	132.8	1,464.7	1,566.5	3,164.1	1,073.89	10,173
1994	2,671.7	16.6	803.0	899.1	1,459.6	403.5	165.1	1,820.4	1,819.2	3,804.7	1,202.26	11,276
1995	2,756.0	13.6	806.6	1,173.0	1,628.9	487.6	163.5	1,802.2	2,022.4	3,988.0	1,396.92	12,269

(Continued)



Table 4. (Continued).

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
AA Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	BB Mining	CC Manufacturing	DD Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	EE Construction	FF-GH Wholesale Trade Retail Trade and Accommodation	II-JJ Transport, Postal and Warehousing Information Media and Telecommunications	KK Financial and Insurance Services	LL Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services excl OOP	MN Professional, Scientific, Technical, Administrative and Support Services	KK-MN FIRE: Finance, Rental, Real Estate and Business Services	Other Services	Total
1996	2,799.9	19.2	769.1	1,304.9	1,653.3	507.3	215.8	2,379.2	2,349.1	4,944.0	1,303.71	13,319
1997	2,676.6	18.6	758.9	1,377.0	1,622.1	569.4	248.3	2,737.4	2,504.8	5,490.4	1,163.91	13,693
1998	2,485.9	17.0	799.3	1,485.5	1,666.2	532.3	261.8	2,886.6	3,036.0	6,184.4	1,308.08	14,494
1999	2,838.9	18.5	832.1	1,441.0	1,726.3	580.4	333.4	3,676.5	2,850.2	6,860.1	1,444.85	15,758
2000	3,596.2	18.3	979.2	1,559.5	1,747.6	608.7	327.4	3,610.0	3,093.3	7,030.7	1,514.83	17,074
2001	5,788.0	19.3	824.2	1,650.8	1,620.6	581.3	278.5	3,071.1	2,877.5	6,227.1	1,371.36	18,101
2002	6,867.7	20.7	857.8	1,503.6	1,823.9	625.3	291.2	3,210.3	3,184.8	6,686.2	1,461.84	19,866
2003	4,308.4	19.3	850.7	1,595.9	1,865.8	623.4	317.8	3,503.9	3,237.6	7,059.3	1,495.50	17,838
2004	4,562.1	20.5	936.3	1,866.3	1,957.7	673.3	354.9	3,912.7	3,488.1	7,755.7	1,600.29	19,393
2005	4,203.1	21.4	945.8	2,028.5	1,922.7	671.1	381.6	4,207.9	3,823.5	8,413.1	1,675.52	19,905
2006	3,596.3	22.6	938.2	2,176.9	1,940.2	702.2	366.9	4,045.7	3,992.9	8,405.5	1,811.55	19,620
2007	4,312.6	12.4	841.5	2,228.2	1,723.5	635.2	472.4	5,208.6	3,951.4	9,632.4	1,860.86	21,280
2008	6,968.1	17.6	860.6	2,233.4	1,680.7	629.6	573.3	5,046.4	4,174.5	9,794.2	1,975.66	24,195
2009	4,156.2	28.5	846.0	2,173.1	1,738.5	650.5	431.0	5,342.8	4,511.3	10,285.1	2,142.37	22,058
2010	6,140.9	38.7	846.6	1,899.3	1,725.3	614.9	584.8	5,759.8	4,313.3	10,657.9	2,195.66	24,157
2011	8,117.0	32.4	877.5	1,982.2	1,816.5	664.8	447.5	6,011.9	4,434.4	10,893.8	2,207.55	26,629
2012	8,012.8	24.2	944.3	2,107.9	2,041.6	718.1	82.2	7,570.6	4,949.6	12,602.4	2,652.44	29,157
2013	5,845.8	30.0	894.1	2,070.7	1,955.3	737.8	106.7	7,293.8	4,904.0	12,304.5	2,336.59	26,226
2014	10,150.9	25.3	934.8	2,303.5	2,067.5	708.0	320.1	7,654.8	5,048.5	13,023.5	2,220.78	31,464
2015	4,712.5	25.3	1,025.6	2,865.4	2,274.0	875.0	286.4	8,115.1	5,580.6	13,982.1	2,612.08	28,412
2016	3,910.9	21.6	1,044.0	3,003.3	2,335.3	808.7	615.1	9,109.1	5,820.2	15,544.4	2,647.19	29,362
2017	7,307.2	20.0	1,121.5	3,198.0	2,515.1	893.4	607.2	10,073.7	6,180.8	16,861.6	2,962.82	34,921
2018	8,695.2	19.7	1,133.4	3,348.1	2,635.6	901.5	657.7	10,440.7	6,241.0	17,339.4	3,008.43	37,123

(Continued)

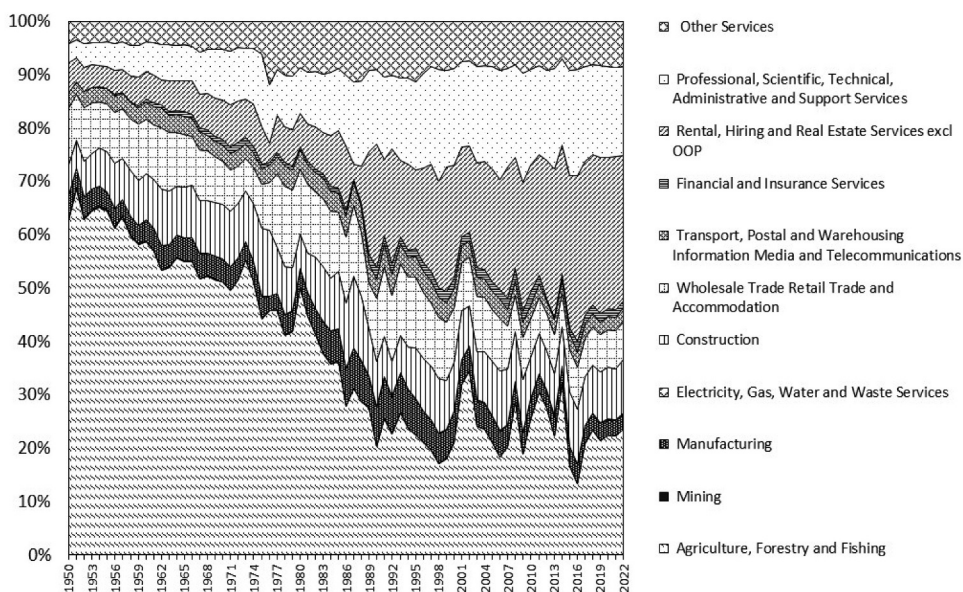


Figure 8. Industry composition of gross mixed income,1950-2022. Source: [Table 4](#).

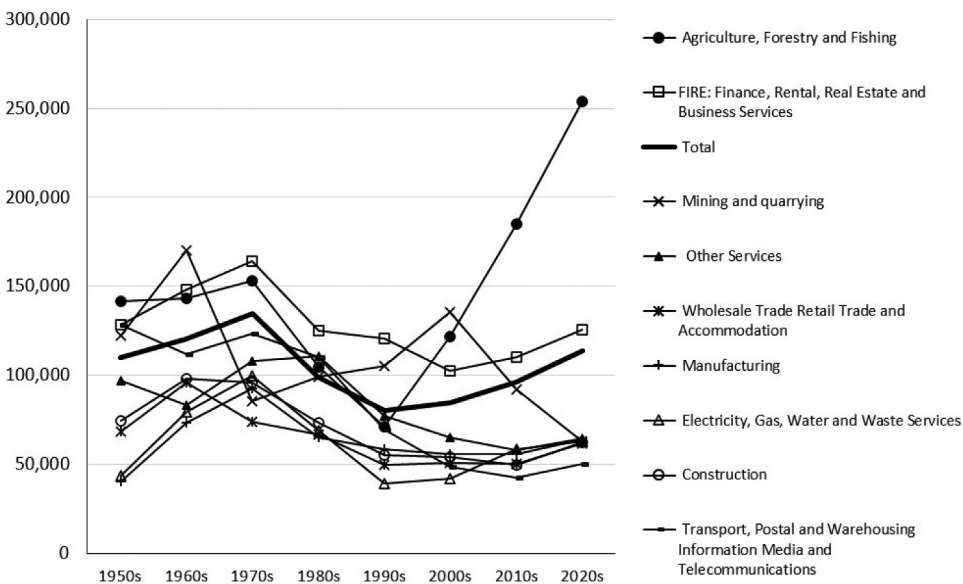


Figure 9. Gross mixed income per self-employed, decade averages, 2024 dollars. Source: Data from [Table 2](#) and [Table 4](#).

in profitability. Gross Mixed Income is calculated before deducting interest payments.) In recent decades the average gross income of self-employed in industries other than agriculture/forestry/fishing and FIRE has converged to a range between \$50,000 and \$70,000 (in 2024 dollar terms), comparable with but somewhat lower than the average wage of \$72,000 in 2024 (Bertram and Rosenberg 2024 Statistical Appendix Table A1 column 9, compensation of employees divided by number of employees). The steep fall in mining and quarrying since 2000 seems especially striking, from \$128,000 in the 2000s down to \$62,000 in the first half of the 2020s – but this industry is so small as to be invisible in Figure 8, and is subject to high volatility.

Figure 10, using data on ‘entrepreneurial income’ (which is measured after interest payments and depreciation), shows the same trend. Again, there are clear differences between the period from 1950 to the mid-1970s on one hand, and the period from the late 1980s onwards. Average annual self-employed incomes in the earlier period were strikingly higher than those of wage and salary workers; from the late 1940s to the mid 1970s, the self-employed received on average double what wage and salary workers received. This broke down from the late 1970s, initially probably fed by falling returns to agriculture following the 1967 wool price collapse, but leading into the recent period where, as has been seen and will be analysed further, there has been a change in the structure of the self-employed economy. Since the mid-1980s, the self-employed have received on average an entrepreneurial income no greater than the average compensation of employees for wage and salary workers. This was a marked change in the inequality of incomes *between* the self-employed and wage and salary workers.

Two important qualifications are relevant here, but pointing in opposite directions. Firstly, because the incomes estimated for the self-employed are mixed income, only part of the income is a return to the labour of the self-employed. If the distribution of self-employed and wage and salary workers across industries and occupations was similar, then the labour of the self-employed might be expected to be rewarded at approximately the same average rate as the labour of employees. If these conditions are approximately satisfied, the self-employed are, on average, getting no return to the capital they use, and so their relative position is even worse than it appears from Figure 10. Secondly, though, the self-employed may be under-declaring their incomes. Cabral and Gemmell (2018) found that the self-employed were under-reporting their incomes by around 20% during the period 2006–2012. If that were the case over the whole recent period then their position would be better than it appears in the official data, but still worse off on average than the earlier period. We have no way of estimating to what extent these two aspects balance out.

4. Returns on factor inputs

As noted previously, this study of the self-employed was undertaken as part of a wider effort to isolate and measure the extent of excess profits (economic rents) in the corporate sector of the New Zealand economy. The approach, based on Barkai (2020), has been to collect detailed information on Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) by year since 1949 and to calculate the annual income required to cover the cost of capital on each year’s investment. Subtracting this from the total actual gross surplus provides our measure of rent. Applying this approach to the self-employed can indicate the extent to which, on

average, Gross Mixed Income does or does not cover the full factor cost of the self-employed's contribution to Gross Domestic Product, as measured by their GMI.

There is one crucial data limitation which we have been unable to overcome. This is the division of the paid self-employed in the Statistics New Zealand numbers into 'corporate' and 'non-corporate'. The corporate group received just a quarter of total GMI in 1987, rising to 45% by 2023 (Table 3). No information is available on its GFCF separate from other corporate enterprise, which has forced us to exclude this group from the calculations below which are therefore confined to the non-corporate self-employed, whose GFCF is shown in Table 5.

There is also an important conceptual limitation. While some of the income of the self-employed is a return to the labour they provide to their undertakings, there is no obvious way to calculate it (and indeed the self-employed may not know themselves). In Figure 11 we show the results of imputing a return to non-corporate labour, by allocating to noncorporate self-employed labour the same share of GMI as the economy-wide share of Compensation of Employees in Gross Domestic Income. Adding to this our estimate of the capital costs of non-corporate fixed capital yields the 'total cost' line in the chart. Subtracting this total from GMI gives the estimated margin, which is positive (indicative of economic rents accruing) until 1980 and negative thereafter. (All numbers are expressed in 2024 dollars using the Consumer Price index.)

This reflects the situation in the period since the late 1980s following the major shifts in self-employed income shown in Figure 10.

These numbers are, of course, averages, which leaves open the possibility that since 1980 the margin in some industries among some self-employed is much greater. Indeed, there is strong evidence of a widening income distribution within the self-employed, with a high-income group remaining, but joined since 1980 by a growing low-income cohort. The next section reviews that evidence.

5. The distribution of mixed income

So far we have looked at average incomes, but this is far from the full picture. This section looks firstly at the distribution of income within the self-employed (both corporate and non-corporate) as a group, and secondly compares incomes by industry. Given that the data available does not allow us to draw strong conclusions regarding economic rents accruing to the self-employed because of the need to impute their labour income, the purpose of this distributional analysis is to seek indications of where economic rents may lie. It also illustrates in a different way the change in the nature of the self-employed from the earlier to the present period.

Figure 12 shows a measure of inequality *within* the self-employed. It is the ratio between the average income of the highest income 10% (decile 10) of the self-employed income distribution to the average of the second-to-bottom 10% (decile 2). We use decile 2 because incomes in the bottom decile are negative (they make losses) in many years.²

The graph on the left shows inequality in the post-war period. Inequality was moderate and rising slowly. The ratio almost doubled from 7.25 to 14.18 in the 33 years from 1950 to 1983. Contrast this with the 15 year 1998 to 2023 period on the right. Starting at around the same level as the early 1980s (averaging 11.6 in the first 5 years), it took off, with large

Table 5. Estimated non-corporate Gross fixed capital formation, \$million.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Building and construction added	Plant & equipment added	Intangibles	Total
1949	338.80	93.46		432.27
1950	14.79	13.90		28.69
1951	17.04	16.78		33.81
1952	21.34	21.86		43.20
1953	25.28	24.50		49.78
1954	25.63	26.18		51.81
1955	30.92	29.50		60.42
1956	34.51	33.34		67.85
1957	34.55	31.25		65.80
1958	36.80	33.93		70.73
1959	37.31	35.16		72.47
1960	38.35	34.07		72.42
1961	42.74	39.88		82.62
1962	46.10	44.00		90.09
1963	49.66	42.82		92.48
1964	50.92	44.15		95.07
1965	56.55	45.99		102.54
1966	63.26	55.31		118.56
1967	68.21	59.44		127.65
1968	66.97	57.89		124.85
1969	72.25	62.39		134.65
1970	79.31	72.41		151.72
1971	88.50	86.48	60.15	235.12
1972	106.02	117.48	1.41	224.91
1973	139.47	141.79	2.05	283.31
1974	178.72	157.28	2.98	338.99
1975	223.40	169.02	4.12	396.54
1976	221.27	208.88	5.77	435.91
1977	277.7	228.5	7.6	514.3
1978	252.4	220.1	9.1	481.5
1979	267.6	269.8	9.9	548.2
1980	312.4	336.8	13.5	662.8
1981	377.8	385.7	17.5	780.5
1982	490.9	517.0	24.8	1,033.6
1983	525.7	501.4	27.0	1,053.1
1984	556.9	605.1	48.0	1,209.9
1985	655.8	835.2	63.7	1,553.7
1986	700.4	832.6	74.9	1,607.7
1987	808.9	837.9	94.1	1,740.8
1988	945.5	867.4	128.3	1,941.6
1989	931.3	847.8	140.9	1,919.9
1990	978.8	927.8	121.5	2,027.2
1991	902.4	1,000.2	138.0	2,041.1
1992	810.4	816.8	124.4	1,751.1
1993	824.9	1,048.1	142.6	2,016.0
1994	1,091.3	1,318.8	147.9	2,558.2
1995	1,350.3	1,572.2	168.2	3,090.5

(Continued)

Table 5. (Continued).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1996	1,591.1	1,529.9	174.3	3,295.5
1997	1,812.8	1,616.6	183.2	3,612.6
1998	1,897.0	1,338.7	212.4	3,449.0
1999	1,772.0	1,455.2	251.3	3,477.2
2000	1,947.2	1,773.1	294.8	4,015.7
2001	1,822.0	1,743.5	273.4	3,840.3
2002	1,646.1	2,148.6	328.8	4,122.5
2003	2,204.3	2,015.6	294.6	4,514.5
2004	2,569.4	2,587.5	431.4	5,587.7
2005	3,154.4	2,338.6	323.5	5,817.1
2006	3,049.1	2,582.0	418.9	6,050.8
2007	3,816.4	2,829.5	562.4	7,208.4
2008	4,121.8	2,633.7	571.3	7,325.7
2009	3,270.8	1,736.7	409.8	5,417.3
2010	3,078.5	1,574.0	548.0	5,202.1
2011	2,679.3	1,495.4	540.9	4,716.1
2012	3,139.7	1,538.9	578.4	5,257.0
2013	2,989.9	1,729.8	629.0	5,348.1
2014	3,616.0	1,583.8	466.4	5,665.5
2015	4,607.2	1,902.0	385.0	6,894.7
2016	4,685.1	2,443.1	451.3	7,579.8
2017	5,802.6	2,794.3	671.8	9,268.7
2018	5,871.7	3,323.3	766.3	9,961.5
2019	6,200.0	3,275.1	815.0	10,289.1
2020	6,676.3	3,368.4	976.0	11,021.4
2021	7,105.6	2,625.7	855.0	10,585.8
2022	9,413.0	5,776.9	1,758.5	16,952.0

variations (probably in part reflecting the survey data source), rising to almost 5 times the inequality at the start of the period (averaging 55.4 in the five most recent years). This is huge and very different from earlier times.

So while there was high inequality between the self-employed and wage and salary workers in the earlier period, the striking feature of the current period is the high inequality within the self-employed.

The high inequality within the self-employed in recent years can also be seen in [Figure 13](#) which shows their real hourly incomes by hourly income decile. In the lowest decile they frequently make losses, and the first four deciles all have very low incomes. In the highest deciles, incomes are very high – the average was over \$150 per hour in 2023.

This contrasts with the inequality among wage and salary workers, seen in [Figure 14](#). There is growing inequality there, but the range of incomes is far less, buttressed at the bottom by the minimum wage, with the average wage at the top around \$80 per hour, a little over half that of the self-employed.

In recent years, 40% of self-employed hourly incomes have been less than the minimum wage as is shown in [Figure 15](#).

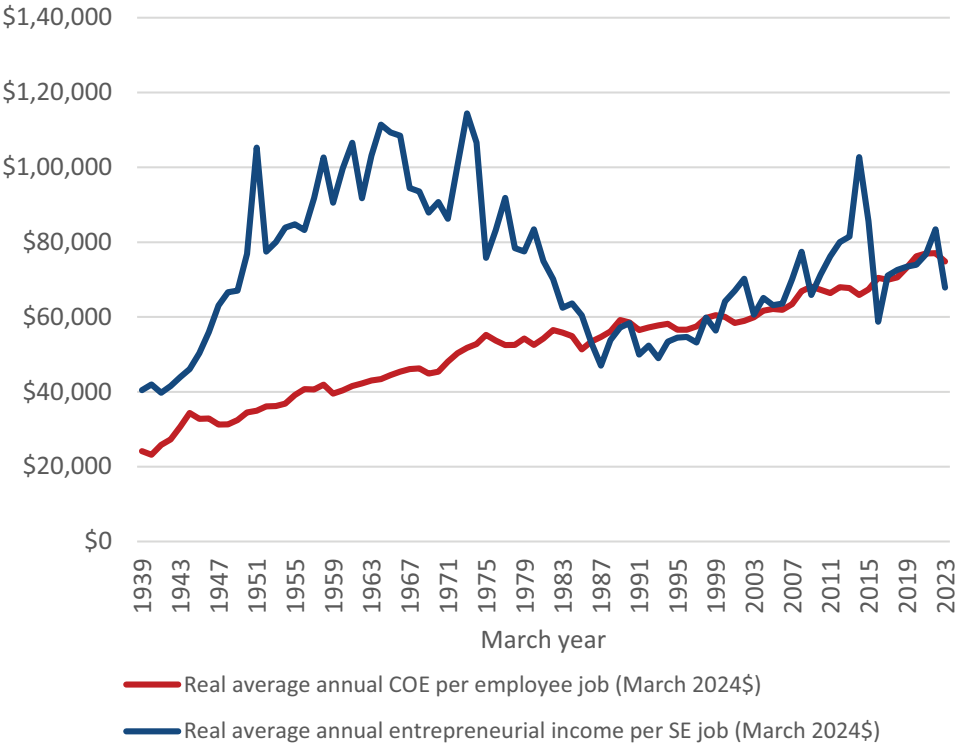


Figure 10. Real average annual income of self-employed and wages and salary earners in March 2024 dollars. Source: Bertram and Rosenberg (2024) Tables 1 and 5.

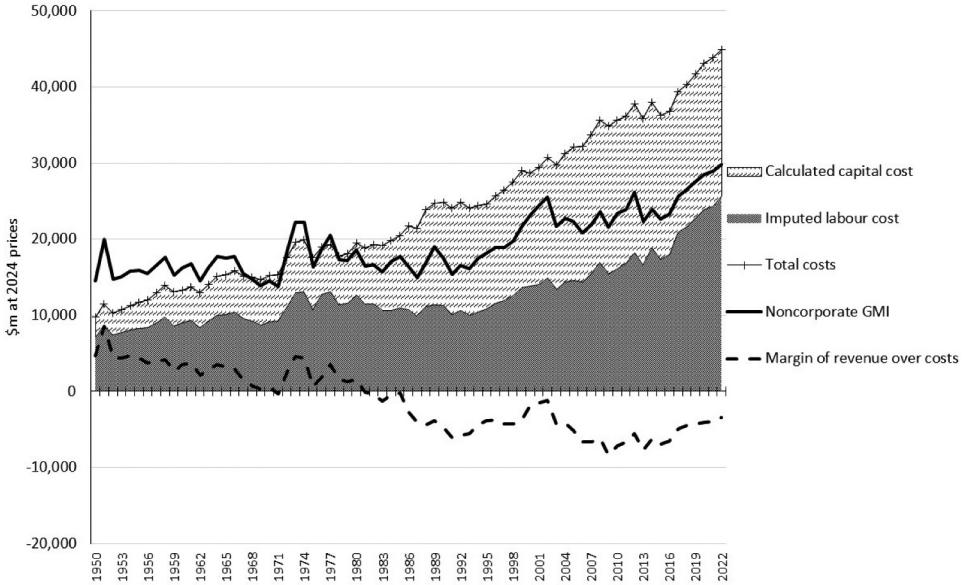


Figure 11. Non-corporate self-employed recovery of labour and capital costs. Source: Table 6.

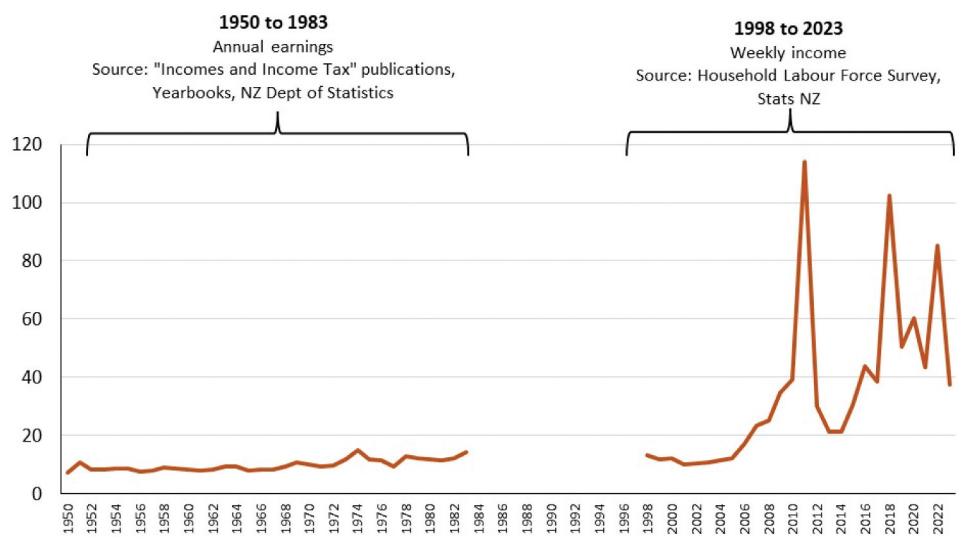


Figure 12. Income inequality among the self-employed: ratio between average incomes in decile 10 (top 10%) and decile 2 (second to bottom 10%) average income. Source: Table 7. See Table 7 for detailed sources and data. Ratio between top 10% and second to bottom 10% income shares.

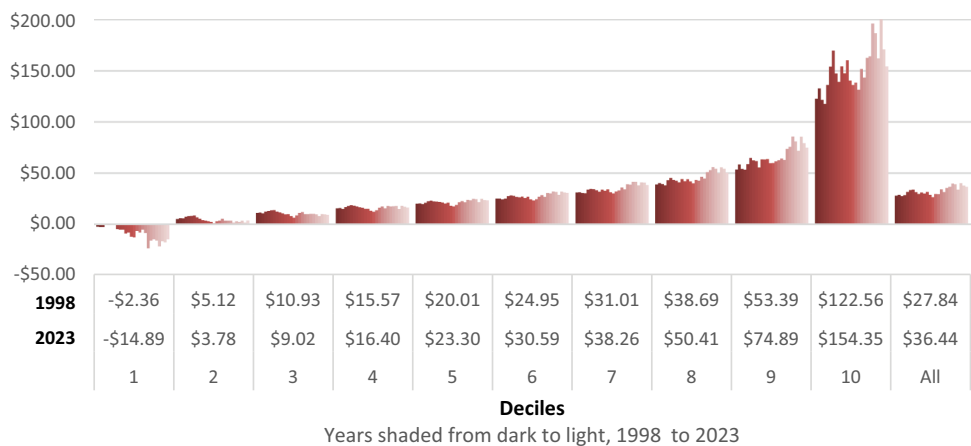


Figure 13. Decile real average hourly earnings of the self-employed by year from 1998 to 2023 (June 2023 \$). Values of earnings for 1998 and 2023 shown. Source: HLFS. See Table 8a.

6. Do the industries in which the self-employed work affect the income distribution?

This question can be answered only approximately. There is poor data by industry, especially for the self-employed, and industry classification standards have changed many times over the years making it difficult to calculate like-for-like comparisons over time, and to show changes in incomes in each industry over time. An indication is shown in Figure 16. It shows which industries most frequently have the highest or lowest mean

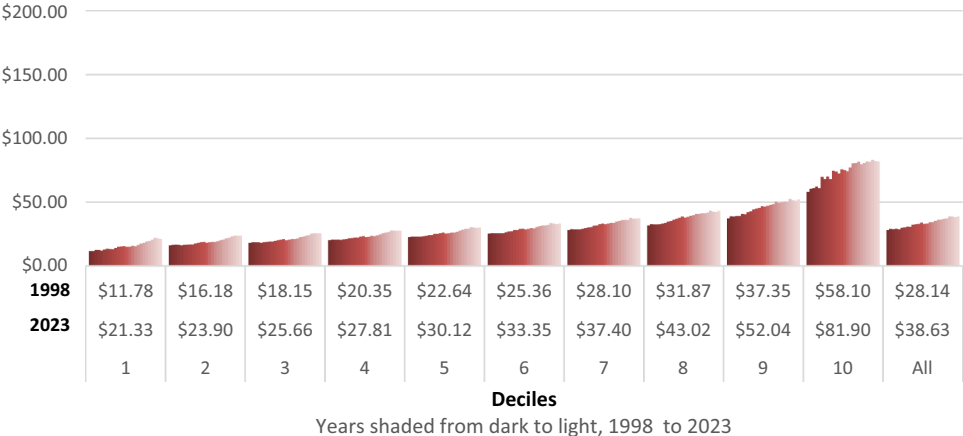


Figure 14. Decile real average hourly wages of wage and salary workers by year from 1998 to 2023 (June 2023 \$). Values of wages for 1998 and 2023 shown. Source: HLF5. See [Table 8b](#).

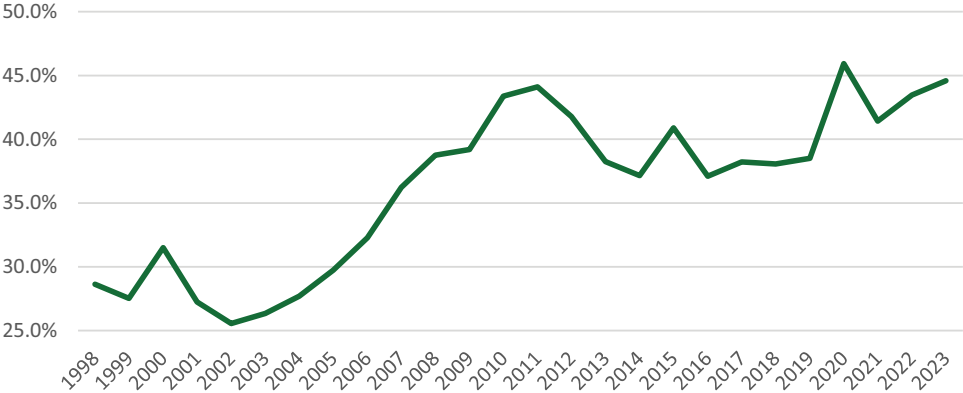


Figure 15. Proportion of self-employed with an hourly income below the minimum wage, 1998–2023. Source: HLF5. See [Table 9](#).

1950-1977		2000-2023	
Average annual earnings from tax data. Source: NZ Official Year Books and "Incomes and Income Tax" publications of Dept of Statistics		Median annual main earnings from tax data Source: LEED Table 1.5, Median main incomes.	
Lowest 20%		Lowest 20%	
1	Apparel, textiles, footwear manufacturing	1	Arts and Recreation Services
2	Other Services, community (includes hospitality)	2	Accommodation, Food Services
3	Forestry, hunting, and fishing	3	Education and Training
Highest 20%		Administrative and Support Services	
1	Professional (includes medical)	Highest 20%	
2	Other Commerce (mainly Finance, Insurance, Real Estate)	1	Professional, Scientific, Technical
3	Sheep farming	2	Health, Social Assistance
		3	Finance and Insurance
		4	Mining

Figure 16. Industries and annual incomes of the self-employed. 1=most frequent. See [Tables 10a](#) and [10b](#).

2007-2022		2000-2023	
Gross mixed income per hour. Source: National Accounts and HLF5.		Median annual main earnings Source: LEED Table 1.5, Median main incomes.	
Lowest 20%		Lowest 20%	
1	Other Services	1	Arts and Recreation Services
2	Accommodation, Food Services	2	Accommodation, Food Services
3	Retail	3	Education and Training
4	Transport, Postal and Warehousing	4	Administrative and Support Services
Highest 20%		Highest 20%	
1	Health, Social Assistance	1	Professional, Scientific, Technical
2	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	2	Health, Social Assistance
3	Professional, Scientific, Technical	3	Finance and Insurance
4	Mining	4	Mining

Figure 17. Industries and incomes of the self-employed: do hours worked affect the rankings? 1=most frequent. See [Tables 11](#) and 10b for the two panels respectively.

or median annual incomes per self-employed during the two periods.³ This does not show the disparity of incomes within each industry.

On the left, in the earlier period, the industries with the lowest average incomes were in clothing and textiles manufacturing, which would include outworkers, mainly women, making clothing for factories; a large collection of services notably including accommodation and food services; and Forestry, hunting and fishing.

On the right, in the current period, sorting is by median incomes for those whose main earnings is from self-employment. Arts and Recreation, and Accommodation and Food Services, unsurprisingly are at the bottom, often below an annualised minimum wage. In Arts and Recreation there are many poorly paid contract workers working on film productions, and artists trying to make a living. The appearance of Education and training is perhaps surprising, but Administrative and Support Services includes clerical and cleaning.

Among the top earners, the picture is largely consistent over time: the professions, health, and finance and insurance. The main exception is that the small sector of Mining replaces Agriculture (whose incomes are very variable, and which has income from capital gains which is not recorded). A surprise is that Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services is missing from the top echelon, again a sector with unrecorded capital gains.

Given that these are annual incomes, the question arises as to whether they are affected by the hours people work: there are many part-timers in the lowest-ranked industries in the present period for example. [Figure 17](#) again shows the current period, but compares the rankings for hourly incomes with the median annual incomes underlying [Figure 16](#). The hourly income is average rather than median and the source income data is unofficial data from the National Accounts so needs to be interpreted with caution. Unfortunately, there are particular problems with the Real Estate and Finance and Insurance data so they have been omitted – though the indications are that they have high hourly incomes.

The figure shows that even when hours worked is taken into account, Accommodation and Food Services is still among the lowest income industries, but Retail appears there too. We also see Transport appearing – Uber and courier drivers among them. At the other

Table 6. Results from warranted-cost model, \$million.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	Current dollars				2024 dollars						
	Economy-wide Gross Operating Surplus and Mixed Income, excluding owner-occupied property (market sectors from 1972)	Compensation of Employees (in market sectors only from 1972)	Economy-wide labour share % (2)÷(1)	Imputed non-corporate		Total non-corporate costs	Consumer price index, March year average	Non-corporate Mixed Income	Imputed non-corporate labour cost \$m	Non-corporate cost of capital	Total non-corporate costs	Margin		
				Non-corporate GMI	Non-corporate cost \$m (3) x(4)									
1950	507	490	49%	320	157	59	217	104	28	14,518	7,133	2,691	9,824	4,694
1951	718	547	43%	484	209	68	277	207	31	19,956	8,635	2,792	11,428	8,528
1952	652	646	50%	398	198	78	276	122	34	14,688	7,311	2,880	10,192	4,496
1953	683	690	50%	425	214	86	300	125	36	15,027	7,553	3,044	10,596	4,431
1954	765	763	50%	470	235	95	329	141	38	15,774	7,874	3,178	11,052	4,722
1955	830	852	51%	487	247	104	351	136	39	15,869	8,038	3,406	11,444	4,426
1956	849	924	52%	484	252	114	367	117	40	15,455	8,057	3,652	11,709	3,745
1957	899	975	52%	531	277	128	405	127	41	16,505	8,587	3,977	12,563	3,941
1958	954	1,052	52%	581	305	140	445	136	42	17,581	9,223	4,241	13,464	4,118
1959	979	1,097	53%	538	284	158	442	96	45	15,269	8,067	4,491	12,558	2,711
1960	1,056	1,161	52%	574	300	149	450	124	45	16,192	8,478	4,217	12,695	3,497
1961	1,165	1,254	52%	603	313	158	470	133	46	16,760	8,691	4,378	13,069	3,692
1962	1,166	1,339	53%	537	287	170	457	80	47	14,507	7,756	4,578	12,334	2,173
1963	1,302	1,419	52%	612	319	183	502	110	48	16,228	8,463	4,844	13,307	2,921
1964	1,440	1,525	51%	684	352	195	547	137	49	17,692	9,099	5,045	14,144	3,548
1965	1,561	1,689	52%	708	368	210	578	130	51	17,550	9,120	5,214	14,334	3,216
1966	1,657	1,854	53%	736	388	224	612	123	53	17,732	9,364	5,394	14,758	2,973
1967	1,660	2,003	55%	669	366	240	606	64	55	15,482	8,467	5,544	14,011	1,472
1968	1,707	2,088	55%	669	368	266	634	35	58	14,738	8,109	5,857	13,966	773
1969	1,818	2,200	55%	666	364	285	649	16	61	13,907	7,614	5,949	13,563	344
1970	2,017	2,444	55%	729	400	305	705	25	64	14,545	7,968	6,087	14,056	489
1971	2,131	2,945	58%	760	441	335	776	-16	70	13,745	7,975	6,051	14,026	-281

Table 6. (Continued).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
	Current dollars						2024 dollars							
	Economy-wide Gross Operating Surplus and Mixed Income, excluding owner-occupied property (market sectors from 1972)	Compensation of Employees (in market sectors only from 1972)	Economy-wide labour share % (2)÷(1)	Non-corporate GMI	Imputed non-corporate labour cost \$m (3) x(4)	Non-corporate cost of capital	Total non-corporate costs	Margin	Consumer price index, March year average	Non-corporate Gross Mixed Income	Imputed non-corporate labour cost \$m	Non-corporate cost of capital	Total non-corporate costs	Margin
1972	2,568	2,672	51%	1,109	565	392	958	151	76	18,478	9,422	6,540	15,962	2,516
1973	3,055	3,000	50%	1,411	699	423	1,122	289	81	22,188	10,993	6,651	17,644	4,544
1974	3,570	3,534	50%	1,556	774	476	1,250	306	89	22,181	11,034	6,781	17,815	4,366
1975	3,487	4,274	55%	1,301	716	536	1,253	48	101	16,383	9,022	6,755	15,778	606
1976	3,716	4,886	57%	1,731	983	578	1,561	169	118	18,600	10,565	6,216	16,781	1,819
1977	5,014	5,517	52%	2,171	1,137	659	1,796	375	134	20,532	10,756	6,231	16,987	3,544
1978	5,351	6,253	54%	2,098	1,131	768	1,899	200	154	17,308	9,327	6,335	15,662	1,646
1979	5,984	7,131	54%	2,301	1,251	882	2,133	168	170	17,195	9,349	6,590	15,939	1,256
1980	6,938	8,318	55%	2,946	1,606	1,083	2,689	257	201	18,596	10,139	6,836	16,975	1,621
1981	7,785	9,747	56%	3,007	1,672	1,349	3,021	-14	231	16,472	9,157	7,390	16,547	-76
1982	9,691	11,778	55%	3,514	1,928	1,645	3,573	-59	268	16,620	9,118	7,780	16,898	-277
1983	11,365	12,893	53%	3,727	1,981	2,040	4,020	-294	302	15,647	8,316	8,564	16,881	-1,234
1984	14,010	13,128	48%	4,199	2,031	2,273	4,304	-105	312	17,039	8,243	9,223	17,466	-427
1985	15,982	14,580	48%	4,949	2,361	2,658	5,019	-70	354	17,709	8,448	9,512	17,961	-251
1986	17,434	17,220	50%	5,209	2,588	3,466	6,055	-846	400	16,500	8,199	10,980	19,179	-2,679
1987	20,431	20,352	50%	5,597	2,793	4,310	7,103	-1,506	473	14,987	7,479	11,541	19,021	-4,033
1988	21,557	22,773	51%	6,907	3,548	5,152	8,701	-1,794	516	16,972	8,719	12,660	21,379	-4,407
1989	23,815	23,551	50%	8,030	3,993	5,660	9,653	-1,623	536	18,969	9,432	13,371	22,803	-3,834
1990	25,044	24,187	49%	7,934	3,898	6,166	10,064	-2,130	574	17,512	8,604	13,610	22,214	-4,702
1991	25,585	24,311	49%	7,307	3,560	6,619	10,180	-2,873	600	15,430	7,518	13,978	21,496	-6,066
1992	25,702	23,951	48%	7,898	3,810	6,822	10,632	-2,734	605	16,546	7,981	14,292	22,273	-5,727
1993	27,518	24,526	47%	7,769	3,661	6,796	10,457	-2,688	611	16,120	7,597	14,101	21,698	-5,578
	(Continued)													

(Continued)

Table 6. (Continued).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
	Current dollars				2024 dollars									
	Economy-wide Gross Operating Surplus and Mixed Income, excluding owner- occupied property (market sectors from 1972)	Compensation of Employees (in market sectors only from 1972)	Economy- wide labour share % (2)÷(1)	Non- corporate GMI	Imputed non- corporate labour cost \$m (3) x(4)	Non- corporate cost of capital	Total non- corporate costs	Margin	Consumer price index, March year average	Non- corporate Mixed Income	Imputed non- corporate labour cost \$m	Non- corporate cost of capital	Total non- corporate costs	Margin
2016	91,387	82,629	47%	17,968	8,532	14,492	23,024	-5,056	979	23,259	11,044	18,759	29,803	-6,545
2017	98,031	87,307	47%	20,264	9,546	14,583	24,128	-3,864	1000	25,674	12,094	18,476	30,571	-4,896
2018	106,800	93,167	47%	21,111	9,836	14,856	24,692	-3,581	1011	26,457	12,326	18,618	30,944	-4,487
2019	110,578	98,520	47%	22,353	10,532	15,273	25,805	-3,452	1026	27,604	13,006	18,861	31,867	-4,263
2020	118,227	104,635	47%	23,702	11,128	15,980	27,108	-3,406	1052	28,546	13,403	19,246	32,648	-4,102
2021	125,167	107,209	46%	24,417	11,265	16,515	27,780	-3,363	1068	28,967	13,364	19,592	32,956	-3,990
2022	133,248	118,363	47%	26,827	12,620	17,322	29,942	-3,115	1142	29,763	14,001	19,218	33,219	-3,456
2023	140,284	128,800	48%	25,748	12,325				1218					
2024									1267					

Table 7. Self-employed average incomes by decile, and derivation of the Decile 10/Decile 2 average income ratio. Income 1950 to 1983 is average annual income in deciles. Income 1998 to 2023 is weekly dollars. No data available for 1984–1997.

Decile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	S10/S2
1950	322	760	947	1,114	1,318	1,563	1,851	2,739	2,739	5,512	7.25
1951	313	791	1,021	1,235	1,483	1,787	2,194	2,829	4,193	8,625	10.91
1952	344	803	1,054	1,287	1,552	1,818	2,197	2,718	3,720	6,845	8.52
1953	396	879	1,172	1,408	1,720	2,072	2,427	2,991	4,181	7,276	8.28
1954	428	915	1,194	1,486	1,767	2,131	2,536	3,148	4,454	7,924	8.66
1955	397	958	1,259	1,570	1,828	2,186	2,665	3,294	4,652	8,228	8.59
1956	408	991	1,354	1,624	1,943	2,233	2,695	3,275	4,539	7,650	7.72
1957	415	1,032	1,421	1,755	2,107	2,445	2,868	3,530	4,782	8,287	8.03
1958	204	909	1,294	1,623	1,930	2,280	2,783	3,452	4,675	8,200	9.02
1959	231	764	1,152	1,485	1,803	2,176	2,534	3,145	4,239	6,747	8.83
1960	302	893	1,329	1,660	2,070	2,386	2,845	3,534	4,798	7,359	8.24
1961	348	955	1,366	1,763	2,124	2,494	2,954	3,572	4,873	7,624	7.98
1962	284	894	1,301	1,663	2,064	2,416	2,844	3,453	4,587	7,366	8.24
1963	230	853	1,309	1,683	2,087	2,434	2,869	3,496	4,914	8,010	9.39
1964	286	918	1,371	1,785	2,165	2,537	3,057	3,947	5,000	8,528	9.29
1965	366	1,067	1,521	1,976	2,323	2,751	3,236	4,378	5,010	8,609	8.07
1966	356	1,083	1,583	2,061	2,414	2,830	3,379	4,512	5,134	8,909	8.23
1967	275	1,006	1,532	2,039	2,422	2,867	3,417	4,418	4,905	8,599	8.55
1968	218	971	1,519	2,012	2,420	2,884	3,489	4,549	4,999	8,992	9.26
1969	181	874	1,495	2,012	2,442	2,931	3,516	4,596	5,218	9,528	10.90
1970	204	1,021	1,625	2,123	2,613	3,107	3,729	4,538	5,830	10,395	10.18
1971	294	1,182	1,794	2,324	2,872	3,432	4,041	4,901	6,224	11,340	9.59
1972	337	1,380	2,165	2,796	3,390	4,057	4,806	5,852	7,368	13,548	9.82
1973	396	1,522	2,437	3,200	3,994	4,791	5,767	7,080	9,409	18,010	11.83
1974	258	1,400	2,518	3,466	4,317	5,252	6,391	7,947	10,738	21,141	15.10
1975	452	1,761	2,780	3,669	4,511	5,394	6,500	8,105	10,522	20,933	11.89
1976	616	2,020	3,216	4,191	5,078	6,173	7,481	9,177	12,210	23,566	11.67
1977	940	2,822	3,976	4,949	5,906	7,003	8,590	10,358	14,159	26,897	9.53
1978	547	2,092	3,391	4,522	5,662	6,828	8,354	10,465	14,131	26,997	12.90
1979	645	2,538	3,989	5,172	6,362	7,834	9,461	11,981	16,266	31,230	12.30
1980	680	2,984	4,925	6,327	7,911	9,513	11,653	14,506	19,205	35,645	11.95
1981	633	3,136	5,034	6,665	8,136	10,077	12,225	15,030	19,728	36,634	11.68
1982	515	3,318	5,568	7,189	9,174	11,117	13,336	16,429	21,507	41,178	12.41
1983	440	3,152	5,778	7,591	9,672	11,962	14,435	17,939	23,811	44,705	14.18
1998	–53.90	147.08	301.46	439.14	493.59	641.40	748.76	921.15	1,177.48	1,970.72	13.40
1999	–66.30	164.11	306.04	417.97	502.95	616.97	882.63	776.98	1,291.85	1,971.38	12.01
2000	–64.89	160.92	288.64	424.33	516.64	605.47	900.94	724.90	1,186.39	1,962.43	12.19
2001	–19.34	197.84	373.01	464.97	563.01	652.18	739.42	891.66	1,315.87	2,005.72	10.14
2002	–29.52	234.41	374.91	517.28	594.61	738.53	895.96	1,042.19	1,356.69	2,425.64	10.35
2003	5.19	233.73	384.76	482.04	617.30	704.34	988.62	1,154.33	1,500.05	2,502.93	10.71
2004	–1.25	248.98	409.47	508.88	632.42	868.77	753.44	1,059.34	1,432.16	2,878.97	11.56
2005	–129.97	200.87	369.71	499.55	610.15	675.96	905.62	1,063.72	1,519.69	2,463.97	12.27
2006	–145.07	150.54	403.73	521.63	638.14	712.20	896.61	1,049.62	1,353.94	2,568.11	17.06
2007	–150.30	116.90	346.44	508.52	658.64	792.29	910.63	1,223.68	1,497.01	2,747.21	23.50
2008	–253.51	105.22	303.59	501.53	581.25	800.29	928.30	1,202.13	1,759.86	2,654.96	25.23
2009	–239.33	90.34	344.95	465.47	665.77	811.36	1,022.83	1,224.16	1,597.55	3,138.44	34.74
2010	–370.24	78.09	267.79	430.91	558.88	740.57	927.80	1,206.06	1,631.26	3,079.47	39.44

(Continued)

Table 7. (Continued).

Decile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	S10/S2
2011	-388.42	24.48	228.97	401.98	608.74	745.17	949.75	1,169.85	1,630.02	2,790.93	114.03
2012	-196.33	98.10	290.82	449.83	608.07	806.74	1,067.73	1,135.94	1,615.62	2,956.20	30.14
2013	-248.96	120.34	396.14	487.16	839.23	772.61	979.05	1,241.53	1,743.81	2,570.05	21.36
2014	-160.83	171.43	430.61	575.30	711.99	953.99	1,269.33	1,234.82	1,737.03	3,675.45	21.44
2015	-266.29	109.84	354.67	567.82	762.89	805.53	1,061.80	1,347.26	1,729.24	3,337.17	30.38
2016	-635.80	82.08	357.36	604.77	714.56	942.78	1,182.12	1,537.58	1,915.00	3,607.08	43.95
2017	-377.39	87.69	355.69	575.00	736.91	932.43	1,179.06	1,503.93	2,067.90	3,370.29	38.44
2018	-362.97	37.55	334.97	591.75	809.07	937.00	1,309.79	1,516.88	2,263.09	3,851.28	102.58
2019	-422.17	75.05	329.67	610.25	742.01	928.31	1,291.38	1,687.76	2,464.11	3,787.49	50.46
2020	-624.20	58.22	277.21	503.51	704.10	950.39	1,186.48	1,566.01	2,056.06	3,504.50	60.19
2021	-444.96	98.16	347.92	635.76	830.92	1,059.39	1,282.89	1,766.06	2,471.77	4,273.24	43.53
2022	-531.45	50.37	356.88	632.19	810.69	1,125.79	1,399.13	1,890.66	2,356.99	4,297.86	85.32
2023	-435.85	111.46	363.53	624.36	880.78	1,185.87	1,414.15	1,739.23	2,554.80	4,185.08	37.55

Table 8a. Decile real average hourly earnings from 1998 to 2023 (June 2023 \$) self-employed.

Decile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	All
1998	-2.36	5.12	10.93	15.57	20.01	24.95	31.01	38.69	53.39	122.56	27.84
1999	-2.77	5.84	11.42	15.81	20.23	25.03	31.18	40.16	58.37	132.71	28.66
2000	-2.72	5.66	10.66	15.02	19.57	24.20	30.51	39.30	53.99	121.61	27.35
2001	-0.78	7.37	12.17	16.62	20.73	24.96	30.26	37.91	53.26	117.70	28.37
2002	-1.12	8.12	12.97	17.77	22.43	27.39	33.70	42.87	58.70	136.12	31.52
2003	0.18	8.19	13.61	18.43	22.93	28.15	34.48	45.08	64.80	154.21	33.36
2004	-0.05	8.45	13.81	18.11	22.26	27.71	34.10	43.13	62.43	169.86	33.72
2005	-4.91	6.85	12.24	17.23	22.04	26.72	33.11	42.38	61.70	147.39	31.24
2006	-5.32	5.27	11.50	16.52	21.72	26.31	31.63	40.86	55.52	139.12	29.55
2007	-5.31	3.97	10.75	15.92	21.02	26.94	33.75	44.06	63.51	154.23	31.03
2008	-9.02	3.30	9.58	15.21	20.16	25.47	32.66	41.97	63.37	147.48	29.83
2009	-8.10	3.04	9.83	15.15	20.89	26.82	34.05	43.94	63.66	160.46	31.48
2010	-12.29	2.36	8.12	13.21	18.02	24.15	31.19	41.93	59.67	140.34	28.66
2011	-12.90	0.75	6.36	11.96	17.41	23.16	30.06	39.86	59.75	136.16	26.48
2012	-6.73	3.04	8.72	13.71	18.94	24.29	31.93	43.24	61.48	138.46	29.41
2013	-8.15	3.67	10.96	16.13	21.39	26.83	33.01	42.50	62.51	131.40	29.27
2014	-5.23	5.21	11.90	17.22	22.44	28.43	35.90	46.38	64.19	151.81	34.00
2015	-8.61	3.47	10.07	15.64	21.40	26.71	34.01	44.55	62.74	143.40	31.42
2016	-23.58	3.32	10.01	17.84	23.74	30.45	39.12	50.94	73.59	162.73	35.43
2017	-16.06	3.60	10.19	17.44	23.47	30.11	38.61	52.85	75.59	164.26	36.60
2018	-14.62	1.46	10.13	17.70	24.79	31.94	41.51	55.76	85.72	196.31	39.78
2019	-15.93	2.90	9.55	17.75	24.48	31.47	41.43	54.32	80.95	186.66	39.08
2020	-21.74	2.31	7.92	14.92	21.56	28.61	37.88	49.74	71.72	162.09	33.76
2021	-16.34	3.29	10.01	17.86	24.74	31.81	40.84	55.67	85.58	200.30	40.05
2022	-17.62	1.79	9.60	17.14	23.56	30.98	40.61	54.27	79.13	170.86	37.84
2023	-14.89	3.78	9.02	16.40	23.30	30.59	38.26	50.41	74.89	154.35	36.44

Table 8b. Wage and salary workers' real hourly earnings in June 2023 dollars, by decile.

Decile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	All
1998	11.78	16.18	18.15	20.35	22.64	25.36	28.10	31.87	37.35	58.10	28.14
1999	11.73	16.46	18.44	20.66	22.92	25.75	28.78	32.80	38.98	60.54	28.90
2000	12.60	16.75	18.47	20.60	22.93	25.62	28.57	32.44	38.64	60.81	28.85
2001	12.55	16.57	18.41	20.76	22.99	25.55	28.62	32.52	39.07	62.25	29.06
2002	11.98	16.26	18.14	20.48	22.98	25.57	28.60	32.73	39.10	61.15	28.74
2003	12.79	16.61	18.70	20.81	23.30	25.83	29.09	33.33	40.80	69.84	29.95
2004	13.40	16.77	18.88	21.10	23.62	26.38	29.68	33.79	40.59	67.94	30.28
2005	13.31	16.87	19.21	21.69	24.15	26.92	30.30	34.74	42.10	70.15	30.93
2006	13.21	16.91	19.19	21.81	24.24	27.06	30.43	35.21	42.84	67.89	30.71
2007	14.12	17.58	19.75	22.28	25.02	28.12	31.59	36.39	44.45	74.58	32.36
2008	15.10	18.13	20.23	22.35	25.12	28.13	31.85	36.98	45.10	73.94	32.74
2009	15.28	18.64	20.57	23.00	25.79	28.89	32.85	37.75	45.60	72.38	33.03
2010	15.53	18.84	20.93	23.40	26.14	29.28	33.32	38.62	46.70	75.86	33.92
2011	15.03	18.26	20.16	22.64	25.32	28.55	32.63	37.97	46.48	74.99	33.04
2012	15.15	18.56	20.50	22.88	25.61	28.93	33.09	38.56	47.11	74.26	33.36
2013	15.79	18.84	20.94	23.45	26.12	29.66	33.72	39.33	47.99	77.25	34.14
2014	15.46	18.87	20.96	23.39	26.08	29.50	33.71	39.62	48.53	80.40	34.49
2015	16.37	19.41	21.50	24.03	26.88	30.48	34.81	40.66	50.15	80.67	35.44
2016	17.53	20.35	22.50	24.85	27.78	31.27	35.40	40.65	49.30	81.68	36.22
2017	18.13	20.72	22.93	25.44	28.44	31.61	35.89	41.27	49.91	79.60	36.50
2018	19.08	21.55	23.68	26.11	28.97	31.90	36.05	41.39	50.24	80.74	37.01
2019	19.61	22.15	24.15	26.55	29.21	32.11	36.08	41.76	50.57	81.86	37.29
2020	20.69	23.14	25.39	27.91	30.35	33.53	37.57	43.24	52.64	81.65	38.75
2021	22.16	23.86	25.67	27.78	30.04	33.18	37.14	42.58	51.58	83.20	38.70
2022	21.63	23.71	25.61	27.56	29.82	32.94	37.10	42.42	51.12	81.98	38.23
2023	21.33	23.90	25.66	27.81	30.12	33.35	37.40	43.02	52.04	81.90	38.63

end of the spectrum, things don't change a great deal: Agriculture appears but, unfortunately, data limitations mean we cannot see Finance, Insurance and Real Estate.

There is therefore evidence that some self-employed receive very low incomes, and the industries in which low incomes are received have changed from the earlier period. They will include platform workers like Uber drivers. However, there are also some self-employed receiving very high incomes which are likely to include economic rents. In particular, there are some industries in which land rents and capital gains are central features. It would be surprising if the self-employed in those industries were not receiving some of those economic rents.

Although these findings are tentative due to the weakness of the data, they have a consistency with each other and with what might be expected.

In summary, in the immediate post-war period to the mid-1970s, amongst the self-employed there were high incomes but only moderate within-group inequality. However, there was high inequality between the self-employed and wage and salary workers, which conforms with a common assumption from that period that to be self-employed was to be (financially) successful. The gap between wages and self-employed incomes is consistent with the self-employed receiving returns from their capital and in some cases from economic rents.

Table 9. Proportion of self-employed with an hourly income below the minimum wage, 1998–2023.

	Number Self-employed	Min Wage (MW)	Number below MW	% below MW
1998	328,600	7.00	94,105	28.6%
1999	364,400	7.00	100,344	27.5%
2000	363,400	7.55	114,471	31.5%
2001	360,400	7.70	98,206	27.2%
2002	361,500	8.00	92,383	25.6%
2003	371,800	8.50	97,941	26.3%
2004	390,800	9.00	108,233	27.7%
2005	393,000	9.50	116,906	29.7%
2006	367,200	10.25	118,517	32.3%
2007	365,000	11.25	132,252	36.2%
2008	379,200	12.00	146,965	38.8%
2009	346,800	12.50	135,934	39.2%
2010	346,800	12.75	150,428	43.4%
2011	362,800	13.00	160,016	44.1%
2012	365,200	13.50	152,579	41.8%
2013	321,500	13.75	122,958	38.2%
2014	308,400	14.25	114,583	37.2%
2015	326,300	14.75	133,457	40.9%
2016	482,600	15.25	179,029	37.1%
2017	497,800	15.75	190,244	38.2%
2018	517,400	16.50	196,930	38.1%
2019	532,600	17.70	205,091	38.5%
2020	567,600	18.90	260,718	45.9%
2021	598,000	20.00	247,728	41.4%
2022	581,000	21.20	252,565	43.5%
2023	596,600	22.70	266,020	44.6%

In the present era (at least post-1998), there is high within-group income inequality among the self-employed with some very high and very low incomes. Inequality with wage and salary earners has changed in nature: on average both groups have about the same incomes while the range of self-employed incomes extends well below, and far above, the range of wages and salaries. This suggests that many low-income self-employed are not receiving any return on capital. At the other end of the distribution, there is plenty of room at the top for both normal returns to capital and economic rents.

7. Conclusion

In the period we have analysed, since 1939, the self-employed have been an important part of the New Zealand labour force and economy. Their importance has varied, in part due to changes in the structure of the economy and in part due to the movement between wage and salary earning and self-employment at times of high unemployment and other disruptions in the economy. There has been a dramatic change in the distribution of industries in which they operate, from a pattern dominated by agriculture, trade and the professions to one in which the professions, finance and business services are more dominant, though agriculture remains important.

**Table 10a.** Industries and annual incomes of the self-employed 1950 to 1977: average annual incomes of self-employed (\$).

Industry	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963
Sheep farming	3,092	5,216	3,522	4,021	4,404	4,574	4,085	4,597	4,251	3,182	3,607	3,446	3,076	3,479
Dairy farming	1,592	1,764	1,838	2,104	2,123	2,033	2,097	2,318	2,217	2,169	2,386	2,507	2,254	2,231
Other Agricultural and livestock production	1,880	2,268	1,991	2,195	2,417	2,575	2,479	2,705	2,702	2,323	2,411	2,442	2,417	2,386
Forestry, hunting, and fishing	1,468	1,620	1,747	1,980	2,063	2,292	2,444	2,505	2,209	1,095	1,410	1,331		1,352
Mining and quarrying	1,940	2,590	2,950	2,500	2,522	3,257	3,167	3,742	3,421	2,903	3,200	3,500		3,913
Food, drink, and tobacco manufacturing	1,572	1,850	1,976	2,024	1,938	2,063	2,588	2,451	2,533	2,667	2,613	2,622		2,651
Apparel, textiles, and footwear manufacturing	1,562	1,830	1,458	1,580	1,646	1,860	1,568	1,787	1,539	1,485	1,298	1,460		1,563
Metals and metal products manufacturing	1,722	1,980	2,081	2,021	2,357	2,443	2,548	2,647	2,503	2,385	2,613	2,691		2,677
Other manufacturing manufacturing	1,900	2,000	2,023	1,855	2,249	2,289	2,614	2,509	2,429	2,241	2,324	2,559		2,498
Construction	1,624	1,786	1,840	1,998	2,100	2,259	2,365	2,390	2,328	2,136	2,320	2,492	2,771	2,651
Wholesale and retail trade	1,702	1,898	1,981	2,158	2,020	2,139	2,299	2,337	2,189	2,163	2,251	2,345		2,402
Other Commerce	2,388	3,052	3,129	2,392	3,181	3,278	3,485	3,085	3,451	3,071	3,435	3,792		3,667
Transport, storage, and communication	1,558	1,654	1,847	1,679	1,928	2,214	2,239	2,223	2,376	2,197	2,490	2,587	2,727	2,579
Professional	3,002	3,536	3,744	4,101	4,026	4,417	4,496	4,557	4,807	4,245	4,806	5,300	5,471	5,717
Other Services, community	1,438	1,670	1,633	1,894	1,710	1,826	1,917	1,890	1,723	1,618	1,747	1,851	1,851	2,009
Total Self-employed	1,970	2,612	2,267	2,484	2,632	2,738	2,710	2,901	2,736	2,427	2,674	2,739	2,687	2,738
Industry	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977
Sheep farming	4,168	4,030	3,952	3,261	3,382	3,732	3,904	3,831	4,648	7,609	8,130	5,850	8,094	11,199
Dairy farming	2,272	2,732	2,958	3,255	3,111	2,854	3,066	3,275	4,482	5,125	5,415	5,349	5,343	6,250
Other Agricultural and livestock production	2,521	2,633	2,761	2,718	2,714	2,651	2,852	3,059	3,498	4,465	5,266	5,000	5,916	6,753
Forestry, hunting, and fishing	1,264	1,194	1,375	1,625	1,453	1,487	1,406	2,154	2,231	2,029	1,342	1,760	6,340	7,295
Mining and quarrying	4,500	4,000	4,160	4,421	4,095	3,571	2,778	2,308	2,727	2,643	3,733	4,615	5,375	6,250
Food, drink, and tobacco manufacturing	2,511	2,578	2,731	2,763	2,529	2,554	3,700	3,769	4,388	4,436	4,342	4,737	5,424	5,882
Apparel, textiles, and footwear manufacturing	1,581	1,676	1,712	1,856	1,840	1,906	2,045	2,173	2,868	3,360	4,050	4,455	6,096	6,633
Metals and metal products manufacturing	2,931	3,067	3,090	3,211	2,949	3,239	3,596	4,331	4,663	4,997	5,772	6,367	6,964	7,652
Other manufacturing manufacturing	2,594	2,699	2,861	2,745	2,781	2,599	2,777	3,116	3,828	3,911	4,900	5,423	5,554	6,069
Construction	2,767	2,990	3,121	3,145	3,095	3,185	3,513	3,915	4,413	5,048	6,255	7,401	7,322	7,735
Wholesale and retail trade	2,442	2,563	2,628	2,788	2,758	2,813	3,042	3,285	3,670	4,210	5,200	6,203	5,959	6,751

(Continued)

Table 10a. (Continued).

Count of occurrences	Percentile														
	0	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9	1	Low 20%	Top 20%		
Other Commerce	4,178	4,342	4,329	3,830	4,061	4,369	4,962	5,349	5,949	6,938	9,078	11,949	13,966	16,138	
Transport, storage, and communication	2,744	2,867	3,007	3,060	2,801	2,984	3,322	3,726	4,102	4,466	5,246	6,917	6,040	6,768	
Professional	6,035	6,485	6,766	7,020	7,276	7,792	8,456	9,652	11,167	12,978	15,684	16,901	15,686	14,297	
Other Services, community	2,089	2,153	2,228	2,440	2,417	2,464	2,622	2,975	3,254	3,538	4,104	5,000	5,307	8,150	
Total Self-employed	2,944	3,108	3,212	3,211	3,205	3,279	3,518	3,841	4,570	5,661	6,343	6,463	7,373	8,515	
Count of occurrences	0	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9	1	Low 20%	Top 20%		
Sheep farming	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	8	7	12	0	19		
Dairy farming	0	1	4	6	2	9	1	1	4	0	0	5	0		
Other Agricultural and livestock production	0	0	0	7	6	5	3	1	6	0	0	0	0		
Forestry, hunting, and fishing	16	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	0	0	0	19	0		
Mining and quarrying	0	3	4	1	0	0	0	0	11	4	4	7	8		
Food, drink, and tobacco manufacturing	1	0	0	10	2	5	2	4	3	0	0	1	0		
Apparel, textiles, and footwear manufacturing	7	13	3	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	23	0		
Metals and metal products manufacturing	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	9	10	2	0	0	2		
Other manufacturing manufacturing	0	1	1	5	3	11	2	2	2	0	0	2	0		
Construction	0	0	0	4	5	3	1	8	6	1	0	0	1		
Wholesale and retail trade	0	0	1	10	5	9	0	2	0	0	0	1	0		
Other Commerce	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	14	11	0	25		
Transport, storage, and communication	0	2	3	1	2	10	9	0	1	0	0	5	0		
Professional	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	28	0	28		
Other Services, community	4	5	12	6	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	21	0		

**Table 10b.** 2000 to 2023: median annual incomes of the self-employed by industry (\$).

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	23,910	34,210	36,340	25,060	24,520	25,410	23,170	24,080	28,280	24,180	26,310	35,210
Mining	33,170	39,040	38,850	49,400	39,480	42,960	45,080	41,990	42,230	48,930	50,810	56,250
Manufacturing	28,760	29,290	31,200	32,960	34,810	36,000	36,610	37,170	38,280	37,950	36,320	37,960
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	26,100	25,710	27,100	30,440	34,200	35,840	36,480	38,670	38,470	35,220	40,200	43,600
Construction	25,390	25,150	27,440	30,160	32,320	34,200	35,100	35,500	36,700	35,250	33,210	34,670
Wholesale trade	33,290	35,170	37,650	38,010	39,220	39,850	40,000	40,970	44,010	41,800	42,940	45,940
Retail trade	23,480	24,020	26,000	27,550	27,870	28,500	28,840	29,500	30,000	29,530	29,940	30,420
Accommodation and Food Services	13,330	13,610	15,020	16,120	17,300	17,630	18,520	19,260	19,840	19,270	19,400	20,410
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	22,540	22,630	24,470	25,490	26,190	26,740	27,490	28,780	28,340	29,000	27,900	29,100
Information Media and Telecommunications	27,740	28,360	27,510	28,460	31,220	35,720	35,200	35,550	35,330	35,710	37,720	37,390
Financial and Insurance Services	39,000	39,220	41,130	40,610	42,520	43,630	44,350	45,000	44,030	42,000	43,080	44,000
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	23,730	23,750	27,640	30,590	34,850	34,710	34,650	35,930	34,000	29,380	31,260	30,380
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	40,130	40,000	41,390	42,730	44,180	46,190	48,490	49,950	52,040	51,850	49,200	51,070
Administrative and support services	18,600	18,740	20,010	20,790	21,060	21,820	23,010	23,720	24,700	24,270	22,690	22,360
Public administration and safety	20,810	23,200	23,220	25,080	27,810	26,930	30,340	32,440	29,220	25,980	28,060	29,080
Education and Training	13,000	14,210	15,690	18,630	20,400	20,050	21,330	22,150	22,910	24,730	24,750	24,940
Health Care and Social Assistance	46,560	44,850	46,920	47,570	48,480	50,480	52,650	55,000	57,840	58,920	56,070	54,750
Arts and Recreation Services	16,510	17,100	18,290	19,190	19,310	20,020	20,230	20,750	21,440	21,350	19,620	19,850
Other services	23,360	23,900	26,560	27,960	28,510	29,260	30,090	30,170	31,400	31,610	30,260	30,300
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	39,700	36,150	44,690	39,830	34,310	41,730	47,500	47,940	50,000	51,500	59,750	56,840
Mining	60,760	66,890	70,130	68,100	64,800	66,660	70,000	70,000	72,300	65,720	77,290	81,560
Manufacturing	40,000	41,120	44,030	46,500	48,000	50,000	51,920	53,790	54,800	56,460	62,620	67,610
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	47,510	48,010	49,040	52,530	55,580	58,310	62,500	62,320	65,000	67,670	67,940	70,060
Construction	36,580	39,090	41,670	43,920	46,160	48,000	48,970	51,070	52,360	52,050	58,390	62,240
Wholesale trade	48,000	48,240	50,280	53,300	54,920	58,920	60,270	63,100	63,750	66,330	70,000	72,470
Retail trade	32,000	33,000	35,070	36,500	38,930	40,600	42,830	44,200	45,380	48,390	52,640	55,270
Accommodation and Food Services	23,630	23,910	25,540	28,230	31,000	33,220	35,160	37,600	37,490	41,030	45,500	49,550

(Continued)

Table 10b. (Continued).

Transport, Postal and Warehousing	29,920	30,650	33,460	34,990	36,210	37,170	38,870	38,380	39,400	41,100	46,790	48,880
Information Media and Telecommunications	43,330	40,160	41,520	44,240	48,260	50,410	50,000	51,360	54,620	55,000	59,480	67,000
Financial and Insurance Services	48,400	50,740	54,000	55,320	60,000	60,450	63,660	65,840	69,610	71,230	79,390	81,000
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	35,450	39,490	41,860	42,550	47,370	48,260	48,000	48,490	50,000	53,370	60,510	55,000
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	53,500	54,970	57,960	60,200	63,200	65,660	65,420	68,610	70,000	70,000	79,960	86,510
Administrative and support services	23,280	23,660	25,050	26,520	28,720	29,180	33,820	36,130	38,420	37,990	46,500	53,220
Public administration and safety	30,120	31,330	32,070	36,060	38,000	36,180	40,140	41,430	42,050	44,750	46,400	47,280
Education and Training	25,810	26,370	26,820	28,030	28,650	28,830	28,990	30,550	32,870	33,080	37,880	39,170
Health Care and Social Assistance	56,480	55,500	57,520	58,720	60,000	60,340	61,000	64,080	68,100	69,480	72,260	76,550
Arts and Recreation Services	21,430	21,760	22,600	24,420	25,600	27,130	27,590	29,710	30,800	30,500	36,090	38,940
Other services	31,070	32,220	33,740	34,360	35,560	36,920	38,240	39,670	41,070	41,600	45,530	48,000



Count of occurrences	Percentile													
	0	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9	1	Low 20%	Top 20%	
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	0	0	1	8	0	9	3	1	2	0	0	1	0	
Mining	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	8	13	0	21	
Manufacturing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	5	0	0	0	0	
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	5	14	2	0	0	2	
Construction	0	0	0	0	0	12	10	2	0	0	0	0	0	
Wholesale trade	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	3	0	0	3	
Retail trade	0	0	0	0	19	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Accommodation and Food Services	10	2	11	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	23	0	
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	0	0	0	19	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Information Media and Telecommunications	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	17	0	0	0	0	0	
Financial and Insurance Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	21	2	0	23	
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	0	0	0	0	4	9	6	4	1	0	0	0	0	
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	19	0	24	
Administrative and support services	0	4	18	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	0	
Public administration and safety	0	0	1	11	10	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	
Education and Training	1	11	11	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	23	0	
Health Care and Social Assistance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9	14	0	23	
Arts and Recreation Services	13	7	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	
Other services	0	0	2	7	9	6	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	

Table 11. Gross mixed income per hour.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	30.19	52.67	31.03	46.42	62.41	63.62	51.94	90.35
Mining	24.43	31.54	37.64	54.60	39.41	27.21	35.94	31.04
Manufacturing	16.83	17.49	16.96	18.62	19.52	21.00	21.65	23.69
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	24.37	25.70	24.95	23.79	19.96	33.07	32.73	19.42
Construction	19.66	19.50	18.08	16.73	17.38	18.51	19.14	20.48
Wholesale trade	21.09	20.57	22.16	20.84	22.37	25.74	25.32	30.31
Retail trade	12.82	12.21	12.31	13.45	14.14	14.56	16.57	17.00
Accommodation and Food Services	9.62	9.68	10.24	10.12	10.72	13.53	13.87	14.93
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	15.81	16.42	15.89	16.33	16.73	17.94	20.42	20.37
Information Media and Telecommunications	18.23	17.77	15.76	17.09	20.67	21.23	27.57	20.23
Financial and Insurance Services	42.35	50.51	39.02	55.23	40.86	7.02	9.70	31.56
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	150.85	148.64	156.88	173.29	174.53	221.40	242.79	244.98
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	38.12	39.06	38.70	37.42	35.90	40.12	41.80	44.18
Administrative and support services	17.11	18.68	18.62	17.67	18.11	18.35	20.58	19.87
Education and Training	21.56	19.86	22.38	20.11	17.72	21.67	18.43	23.01
Health Care and Social Assistance	42.93	43.99	43.94	51.46	50.62	52.37	53.47	47.01
Arts and Recreation Services	24.31	23.07	21.62	14.67	14.38	40.53	18.46	18.99
Other services	16.83	17.23	15.67	15.21	14.51	16.32	16.22	17.54
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	43.19	37.11	72.45	92.75	87.28	96.73	96.55	104.77
Mining	25.53	24.54	34.98	41.98	72.98	80.97	139.44	485.50
Manufacturing	25.31	26.49	28.04	28.68	30.07	30.05	36.65	42.22
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	25.63	27.27	27.42	27.53	34.11	35.33	22.22	29.03
Construction	24.64	25.24	25.32	26.86	28.17	29.37	30.04	32.73
Wholesale trade	34.30	35.52	31.11	34.31	33.94	34.76	29.22	33.40
Retail trade	18.48	19.25	23.67	26.74	25.81	27.38	29.81	34.83
Accommodation and Food Services	16.53	17.61	20.56	22.48	22.51	24.71	33.35	41.41
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	23.95	20.87	22.97	23.74	23.42	25.54	22.39	27.94
Information Media and Telecommunications	31.82	30.60	32.56	34.98	40.44	48.07	46.65	46.61
Financial and Insurance Services	29.85	57.94	60.48	71.26	64.56	60.92	49.66	51.89
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	255.94	253.43	310.37	351.90	361.14	352.64	344.75	331.32
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	45.59	47.59	48.99	52.08	52.59	55.89	55.31	57.61
Administrative and support services	19.69	22.34	21.94	23.02	24.86	25.42	28.39	31.52
Education and Training	22.99	21.72	20.23	19.30	19.90	27.26	22.34	22.99
Health Care and Social Assistance	52.04	50.26	52.74	54.79	57.80	60.02	62.19	63.38
Arts and Recreation Services	22.30	22.32	21.87	22.70	25.81	30.59	25.80	30.75
Other services	18.56	19.21	18.92	20.20	21.22	22.92	23.31	22.56

	Percentile													
<i>Count of occurrences</i>	0	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9	1	Low 20%	Top 20%	
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	8	0	12	
Mining	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	8	3	2	0	5	
Manufacturing	0	0	0	3	0	6	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	1	0	1	1	0	2	5	4	2	0	0	2	0	
Construction	0	0	0	2	5	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Wholesale trade	0	0	0	0	1	2	9	2	2	0	0	0	0	
Retail trade	0	7	3	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	
Accommodation and Food Services	8	3	3	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	14	0	
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	0	0	7	6	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	
Information Media and Telecommunications	0	0	1	1	3	1	1	8	1	0	0	1	0	
Financial and Insurance Services	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	8	2	2	10	
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	0	16	
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	6	0	0	6	
Administrative and support services	0	0	2	8	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	
Education and Training	2	3	0	4	1	1	5	0	0	0	0	5	0	
Health Care and Social Assistance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	10	4	0	14	
Arts and Recreation Services	0	0	5	6	0	2	2	0	0	1	0	5	1	
Other services	3	3	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	0	

We are interested in economic rents in the New Zealand economy, but systemically weak data about the self-employed, and conceptual problems – particularly the need to impute their labour income – makes it difficult to produce valid rent estimates for them. Our best estimate at present is that up to 1980 there were positive rents, but that since then the non-corporate self-employed have been, on average, earning substantial negative rents – in other words, failing to cover their costs of labour and capital. Yet the average hides very large variation.

There has been a major change in the distribution of self-employed incomes, both compared to wage and salary workers and among themselves. In the earlier period, the self-employed were (on average) among the high-income strata of society, receiving incomes double the average for wage and salary workers. This makes receiving economic rents during this period very credible, especially given the nature of the industries and professions in which they were primarily engaged. Their within-group inequality was moderate, leaving room for accrual of economic rents among many of them.

But from the 1980s the average incomes of the self-employed and wage and salary earners converged, while inequality within the self-employed rocketed. A large proportion (40%) of the self-employed report receiving hourly incomes below the minimum wage, and so are not earning enough even to receive a reasonable reward for their labour

let alone cover their cost of capital as the overall average suggests. But at the other end of the spectrum, the highest decile of self-employed are receiving about double the income of the highest decile of wage and salary earners. There is plenty of room for economic rents to be part of that income, and again, the industries in which they work make that credible.

We have outlined a picture of large changes in the composition and role of the self-employed who remain important in New Zealand's economy, but we have not been able to be definitive as to their part in the rise in economic rents in recent years. We lack fully reliable information on their activities across industries, and on crucial aspects such as the investment behaviour of corporate self-employed which would allow us to calculate economic rents for this subgroup. For an important but poorly understood sector of New Zealand's society and economy, these data weaknesses need to be remedied, and we will continue to investigate ways to do so.

Notes

1. In the Census series, this increase is partly due to the inclusion from 1986 of those working fewer than 20 hours per week.
2. The sources for the two periods are different, but we do not think this invalidates the comparison qualitatively. The earlier period is from tax data and annual incomes in the tax year which ends in March; the recent period is from the Household Labour Force Survey and weekly incomes in June.
3. We sort the industry incomes in each year and calculate decile boundaries and the frequency over the period with which each industry appears in each decile. The figures show the industries that appear most frequently in the lowest two deciles and highest two deciles. The number of industries available is limited in the early period to 1977.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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