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Opening Statement to be used by Jack Zinn and Michael Keats at the Public Hearings of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations on the Inquiry into Issues specific to Workers over 45 years of Age Seeking Employment or Establishing a Business following Unemployment

Key Points

1. Men in modern Society are increasingly marginalised. Older Men who have been made redundant, retrenched or retired are increasingly "invisible" to mainstream society. The demand for OM:NI groups is evidence of the need for proper community recognition of the needs of Older Men.
2. Primitive man had 3 essential functions, defence, providing food & shelter and reproduction of his group.
3. Modern man in the 21st century is socialised to substitute work for the first 2 of these functions by accepted custom and practice. Defence is the role of the Police and the Armed Services. Food and shelter are purchased by "doing work." Significantly work. is not exclusively the domain of men.
4. Reproduction is a short term activity with increasing emphasis on contraception. World wide declining birth rates, often reinforced by government policies are evidence of this change.
5. When modern man is removed from work he has no defined role in society. Boys at a young age are still taught to be competitive and show only "manly emotions." It is not surprising many men in later life are ill-equipped to cope with life. They often resort to suicide, violence to others and a range of antisocial behaviours.
6. Work for men and particularly Older Men is an essential part of their health and well being. There used to be appropriate 'rites of passage' from work to retirement. These are now perfunctory if performed at all.
7. Without these rites men leaving the work force, and particularly Older Men become disconnected from society. Few have the necessary skills or desire to be carers or community citizens. This is particularly so for men who have been competitive of other men in their careers. Many become reclusive. Most feel unwanted and useless. The fact is these men have collectively, a great knowledge and ability to mentor young people to be successful in the work place and as citizens.
8. The world of work for men is much more vital to our society than balance sheet bottom line figures. OM:NI would contend that higher employment rates for Older men translates into a more productive, knowledgeable and wiser society.

Some Commentary on the evolving position in Australia

Whether we like it or not the Australian economy is part of the global world economy.

Many corporations are now more powerful than the governments of the countries where they operate. There are a number initiatives which are possible for

employees and governments to set in train to offset the impacts globalisation in Australia. Some of these are already part of our Australian culture but need nurture and encouragement to be effective in an increasingly tough environment.

Employees need to be convinced that they must continuously reskill themselves and be ready, willing and able to face the prospect of multiple careers during their working life. This concept entails by its very nature that there will be periods of "retirement" while an employee is "reskilling" to be "work ready" for the next job.

Governments need to be both supportive and flexible in providing benefits to workers during this process of constant transition. An employee who has accumulated assets and benefits should not be forced to liquidate those benefits in order to access subsistence support while reskilling. While there may be some attraction to governments to force such a process, it creates a longer term problem for self sufficiency in the post work phase of life. The psychological impacts of such a process should also not be underestimated.

There would seem to be evidence from the USA and Europe which points to the old 3 phase cycle of life (education, work, and retirement) now becoming a cycle which is repeated many times in an employees life.

Researcher, Edwards (A.F.R. 2/2/2000) postulates looming labour shortages for Australia in the near future. The problem is not soluble by immigration. It is structural and will require the existing workforce to be smarter and encompass a greater proportion of Older Employees. The issue of maintaining and developing appropriate skills in Older Employees will be a necessity.

Possible Options

1 The Japanese model of matched tapered pay and social security benefits. Of all the OECD countries Japan has an enviable record in how it retires older workers from the work force. This model is worthy of further exploration by the Committee and discussion with major employers.

2. Incentives for employers to keep older workers engaged. Already there are some incentives for workers to remain in the work force and not draw down on the Age Pension. What is required is equally strong incentives for employers to retain Older Workers and provide genuine training opportunities.