

Terry J Healy
5 Halse Place
KARRINYUP WA 6018

April 12, 1999

The Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education, Employment
and Workplace Relations
Suite R1 116, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Madam/Sir,

I am responding to press advertisements calling for submissions on workers over 45 year of age seeking employment or establishing businesses after unemployment.

For the record, I am a 57 year old who found himself unemployed after 36 years continuous employment both in Australia and overseas. During that time I was in middle and senior management in several large public companies. Despite recent setbacks my wife and I have raised and educated two sons who now work as professionals in outback Australia.

Due to my experiences I was invited to join the Board of D.O.M.E., a mature age employment and training service in Western Australia. It is this plus experience that prompts me to make this submission. It concerns me and bureaucrats in this country are apparently unaware of the crisis in mature age unemployment, the resultant loss of experience in the workforce and progressively worsen in the future.

My submission responds to your stated criteria as follows:

Social. In a country that has experienced comparatively full employment for a generation, there is a social stigma in becoming unemployed at a time when people can be making their most valuable contribution to the economy and society. (An interesting sideline to this is the decline in membership of service clubs due to prospective members not having the time or financial ability to contribute as they may have once) While friends and family are supportive, the general attitude of government agencies and others is that you have nothing to offer in your chosen vocation and should take any work no matter how unsatisfying it may be. To those ejected from the workforce, even with substantial packages, this attitude is demeaning and, in many cases flows through to their immediate families. I know of children forsaking studies as a result of their father's redundancy and, in extreme cases, suicide of people who still have so much to offer society. While some people may happily turn to unpaid voluntary work, this is not always economical or psychologically viable.

Economic. Recent reports indicate that a growing number of bankruptcies are people who have invested their redundancy packages in a small business and subsequently failed. I have personal and anecdotal experience of many such cases. Conversely, I know of many cases (mine included) where unemployed people have invested their skill only in starting a new business in their chosen field. This preserves their valuable capital while creating greater pressures to establish a cash flow. At this stage, the most iniquitous tax devised by man or woman comes into play and exacerbates problems of starting a business from scratch. At a time when a business is battling establish itself with rent, cost of capital equipment and wages, the ATO steps in for its tax both on any meagre profits made plus on expected (and usually inflated) income for the next 12 months. Currently, when big business is getting more and more concessions from conservative governments, surely it is time to scrap provisional tax to encourage the initiative and experience of small business ventures.

Industrial. The industrial problems facing the mature unemployed are probably no different to others in the workforce. While I have never belonged to a union, I view with concern the current move by governments to undermine the union movement.

From personal experience and observation, I believe the exploitation of casual and part time employees (the categories most mature age find themselves in) is increasing and needs closer attention.

I also believe that the dramatic decline in customer service in this country can be attributed in part to the lack of senior staff to supervise and teach younger staff the basics.

My recommendations would be for state and federal governments to recognise the enormous waste of talents that resides in our mature age unemployed and to mount a an education programme to encourage industry to utilise these talents; organise specific work programmes for mature age unemployed and, finally, look at industries lacking skilled employees to take on re trained mature aged.

I trust my observations may be of value to you and look forward to the results of your deliberations.

Yours faithfully,

Terry Healy