

2 Ross Street
Plympton Park SA 5038
~~Private~~

April 26 1999

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

I refer to letter April 19 1999, and enclose a written submission, together with some illustrative clippings, and I would also ask that his covering letter be part of the submission.

In deciding to send the very roughly presented comment, I stress that in part I am inclined to regard it as a waste of time, through a growing despair that is due to my particular view (very jaundiced) of the political culture, so I thus sadly have little confidence that his inquiry will lead to any more innovative policies, attitudes than we experience today. But I also recall lobbying Dr Nelson, Chair of his Committee, on unemployment, before he decided upon a career change, to go into politics, and I would ask Dr Nelson to put on his hat as a medical practitioner, to be mindful of the largely adverse effects on both physical and mental health that flow from job loss, and from poverty, for those whose loss of capacity to earn a living means fully-fledged poverty.

On Friday last, April 24, on a routine visit to my GP, for the first time I can recall, I had a high blood pressure reading, and of

2 course, it is a source of constant anxiety, to be on the thin end of the wedge, to be constantly aware of all of the factors that add up to his now entrenched surplus of workers, at both ends, and as someone who is concerned for the young, I wonder if the older people losing jobs could be considered for some new kind of retirement package, so the whole pool of unemployed people can be more streamlined . . . These are the sort of ideas that float around in my mind, and not in isolation, because I do moot some of these with others, then get encouraged to put the comments to the politicians . . . I have developed a correspondence network, which includes a regular exchange of ideas with social researcher, Hugh Mackay, but all in all, it goes too around in circles, because the political orthodoxies (now the very classic (80s, 90s) neo-liberal economics) prevail.

I would have thought it so obvious now that to be older and out of work is (to use the fashionable jargon) end game, end of work is a rational conclusion, for me, based on a rational assessment of both my own experience and the current market, which I have in effect studied intensively during this decade where I've had only very occasional paid work, and it is now apparent that no paid work is a likelihood for life, making the prospect of old age not at all (relative to my far better off siblings, for instance) attractive, but it is a poverty where only a little extra in annual \$ income could alleviate the anxiety about basics, prevent maybe too

3 illnesses that can arise from such anxiety - and this flows not only to others in my immediate family (where I live with aged parents, without whose additional support I'd be possibly homeless, or would face more reduced quality of life in rental accommodation etc) but to the society in general.

It could be that the hypertension is in part or in full due to the increasing anxiety, as I come to a realisation that the odds against to have a paying job, let alone to do worthwhile work as a career are huge... There are many highly qualified, very well educated people who are virtually redundant and we are in many instances well able to analyse our chances realistically, yet the programs, policies often fly in the face of allowing credit for self-awareness, maturity, let alone equal capacity with many a more fortunate person doing his analysis for a salary... I think we all know the score, and yet there's a block where to admit certain facts gets turned into a negative - if I say (to a ^{say} Job Network officer) ~~that~~ I don't think I'll get a job, it's taken as if I have low self-esteem, and I get told to be confident (often by people who have no self-confidence, who really also are afraid too that their jobs will disappear!)

- Here are some generalised assumptions,
- 1) one hugely prevalent being that the consequence of unemployment
 - 1) is loss of self-esteem - I think too many Australians are caught in a vicious circle, where professionals emphasise this aspect, but do not

4 consider expanding the outlook, taking account of the reality where (since I'd say late 70s) jobs have become scarce, good ones are even harder to come by. . . so why would any experienced person who has done a job - or many - well take offence, then become totally demoralised when it's such an employers' market anyway? . . . it's poor human relationships never I think have led to this often giant misconception - it has though become all-pervasive, the young have the added factor of never having tried. . . we have decided to have a job, lost sight of the reality where hundreds of people easily can perform many tasks, can be transferred to new jobs, and when there was plenty of work, people were often (usually) trained, for shop assistants it took half a day. . . I have become at times appalled by the extent of decline, over loss of jobs where often those in the jobs have been aware that they could do far more, that they are under-extended - the focus now on whether someone is "computer literate" is folly, when anyone (it gets easier and easier, according to the sales hype) can quickly learn to use the tool, yet not anyone can use it with linguistic fluency, etc. . . there's a whole heap of what I'd have to call dick-headed attitudes to the skills, to education - those of us older have seen more, done often a range of things in life, but all of it is at risk here in Australia of being lost, because people are believing they somehow, sans job, are far lesser beings than all the people in paid employment - the status accorded to having a job is out of balance. . . Those who do have power (= money) are

5, the ones choosing the economic path, and the choice includes the weighed benefit that comes from the efficiencies, from the downsizing now results for some people in being put out to pasture, ironically, yes, because in the early 80s, the promise was all of us would work less, technology would free us to have time for leisure, but we are allowing a different pattern, and it means for me a drop in the standard of living, a thing of course no-one welcomes... if I could be turned into a 20 year-old with the savvy acquired at 53, I could no doubt be a winner, be the journalist I was told, at 12, very facefully was "no job for a lady", but I am a middle aged woman, in a world where only a handful of my age peers who are women have any influence on business, and soon... the prospect of long life is possible now, but long life without means to have a modest comfort is? ... is there more attractively for the rich, and there's a split in the world, where for the global winners there's all the science, the advances, but for the rest of us? ... separate development, a social apartheid, a new feudal order... to be successful, to live well, the means, money is crucial... the market economy can become exclusive, it is for me... for many an older former worker, and can we get work other than by exclusion of someone else, of the young, of the children... it cannot be looked at, I'd contend, in isolation, as is how it's kind to be viewed if people are put into categories.

Yours faithfully
~~me Mont~~
ANNE MONTEN

Submission to the Standing Committee on Employment,
Education and Workplace Relations inquiry into
issues specific to older workers.. by Anne
Monten, 2 Ross Street, Plympton Park SA 5038
(telephone 08 82767294)

Please refer to letter April 19 1999, intended as
part of his submission, to the Senate Employment,
Education and Training References Committee
Report on the inquiry into long term unemployment,
and to my submission to that inquiry, No 39 (see p.
131). Although I do not have a copy of that
submission, I would suggest its content could
provide insight; in particular I claim that overall
little has changed in terms of attitudes to
employment, which for me is a source of
frustration such that I am making his submission
with ambivalence to do especially with
the terms where to inquire into "The social,
economic and industrial issues specific to
workers over 45 years of age seeking employment
following unemployment" is so daunting, is thus
to me a topic that needs a royal commission,
that cannot be easily examined in relation
to age, when the unemployment in our
society is structural, is a consequence of
changes and more change to come as we
are revolutionising our entire lives. I thus
cannot divorce from my personal circumstances
the wider implications, and I would suggest
that primarily work is not other than
social, a central activity of living, in our
tradition, the means to earning money but also
the means to fulfilling our aspirations, so that makes
it a social issue, work sustains, shapes the
society, the society is what we are, and
the economic planning, the industrial
laws, the conducting of business is what we
regard as work... that convoluted paragraph

2 perhaps shows me as overwhelmed, and I would argue the changes are of that magnitude, and I would also argue that we have not engaged in comprehensive dialogue, that there is well-meaning but inadequate attention to the "new facts" of change, above all the consequence of poverty is understated, is under-the-rug, is so possibly because for the post-war generations to be poor is incomprehensible, and so I ask you to consider poverty as the social consequence now experienced by many people - middle-aged - whose expectations were and still are of being able to avoid it through frugal work, through either getting another job or going into a business, and I would ask the Committee to examine poverty, to take steps to discover the extent of poverty in the numbers of people who - for whatever reason - are in effect redundant, and to regard the eradication of material poverty as crucial, be it through work eventually and/or a revision of income support / welfare to recognise that unless a person has assets and additional income above the level of social security (be it pension or benefits), the annual income (circa \$9,000 per annum or less) is insufficient to maintain basic health, housing: not all unemployed people are equally poor materially, but for a basic level of social security and to maintain a basic standard of living, people need a home: shelter, nutrition and capacity to continue their care.

In our society, for most people, the job is the source of being able to live independently, and for people who have had that

3 - experience (in contrast with some youth, who have not, and some who could be life-long un/under-employed) the prospect of no job is the prospect of a drop in the standard of living, the prospect of unemployment is now a big fear, and to be actually 'jobless' is to become dispossessed, a term I'd prefer more discussed, because socially, unemployment is being thrown out, being surplus, being part of a marginalised blob, where quickly people disappear, become (it is dehumanising) "the unemployed" (I saw in an article reference to "the unemployed and people", and use of language is revealing, the journalist - unfortunately I did not keep the piece - reveals the psyche, there's a separate blob, "other", no longer "people"). ... we become regarded (I'm not an economic speaker leads us thus?) as commodities, "dead Ash" (in a Will Hutton article I think I put with the submission, 1995, to the Senate Enquiry there is that analogy, very apt). ... I find I am disturbed by the language, by the reduction of all of the complex issues for people (whose lives are often shattered by losing a job, in more ways than about the money alone, but a big factor is the poverty it can mean, does for many) to statistics, and to statistics where it is suggested that some understate the actual unemployment, statistics about jobs that place no focus on the nature of the jobs (either lost or gained), and the services to the unemployed people are now conducted in such isolation from the mainstream, reinforcing this psychology, both among those working (at all levels) and among the people who

4 are not in jobs, who are part of another blob, the "jobseekers".

Can you please regard to lose a job as to be poor, in our society, because people's status has become linked to having an occupation and a pay packet, and could the committee try to put yourselves into the shoes of those who are becoming a subclass, and could you examine first and foremost the loss of income plus the loss (through no job available, in an immediate as well as ongoing sense) of being part of the workforce, where to go to work has been the mark of being an adult - consider how to live on \$9,000 per annum, long term, consider how we expected to have a living wage for adults, until the statutory retirement age, consider how that is now no longer a possibility for all the adults over 45, so that means those of us excluded become excluded from the superannuation contributions, become in some cases (and I would suggest we need to examine it all based on means, assets and income) unable to afford the housing costs, the mortgage that meant home ownership that gave old age housing security - here are the emerging social negatives of poverty now, but I think there is also in Australia an enormous shame attached to poverty, to admit that there is not enough cash for the dentist, to be assertive is not generally the way people are... here's the stigma (inherited) of "bludger", the stigma of to be on welfare, and you, the Committee, could be in a better position than I am to

S judge (from how many respond, to the inquiry) whether the loss of confidence, self-esteem is at epidemic levels among older unemployed people: I find I am atypically confident, and I attribute it to the extensive experience where I know that my work capabilities are not the reason I am out of work: it is the imbalance now, the wealth can be made with less labour, we are cruelly allowing people to believe it is somehow not only their fault (if they fail to get another job, etc) but within the capabilities of individuals to create jobs, within the capabilities too of the same employers who are able to make money via technology with less workers, who are too putting a big weight on increased return to shareholders at the expense of to provide jobs that in turn have a social benefit — we are all reliant on others, but there is now the cold, harsh fact that objectively we know — unemployed people are not encouraged to provide any analysis of the circumstances, and the (I consider ill-conceived, too hastily changed) JobNetwork isolates the market, so to speak, is like putting the unemployed into the equivalent of the infectious disease ward, with the "new" employment agencies also isolated, and does this not risk more (not less) of the atomisation, where unemployed people are separated out, have specialist services, rather than to keep in the mainstream especially the experienced, so we deal with the mainstream agencies, and I would ask you to consider radical surgery to

↳ the current system, to encourage the big mainstream specialists in recruitment to become engaged with the people who are out of work, to have a look at the experience, to do much more vocational counselling, where perhaps there is also a need to "stream", to have graduates put on the books of the specialists in executive careers, because if there is to be use of the educated, experienced minds, if there is to be any commitment at all to "meaningful" work (much said), we need to be able to discuss it all - to be retained needs openings, traineeships for the older worker could be developed, taking into account much more the thoughts on it all from the people becoming or actually out of work.

For women over 45, the earlier tradition leave us high and dry, we were not considered for work as any career, that was to be "men's business", and there is the fact of life where we have aging parents, relatives, and that raises the value of all the unpaid work, where if asked (the key is to ask, to ask is rarely done) women could welcome an option of the household, "home duties", with some level of income support (compensation for job loss package) to prevent both individual poverty and the neglect of the old, the sick - children need care, but so too at the other end of it all, do older people, preferably in families through the members - the family is supported by its workers, our (post-war more narrow, nuclear

The unit reduces it to mum, dad and children, but this now, economically, is under question, is falling to bits for some etc.)
Feminist assumption of careers for all (to have all of it) has ignored old age, and sickness too - there is plenty of social work undone, and a commensurate (possibly) increase in a social work industry, because socially we are in disarray, a dysfunctional society which is in no small part due to the increasing gap between the affluent and the poor, due to much more (I think unenlightened) focus on the self, to maybe mega-individualism.

My own case is one where I assess my chances of getting a job as low, due to a combination of factors, where age is significant but where too the feminist revolution creates expectations, pressures that I would argue women of 45+ could be asked about, and after all, haven't we - women especially of 50+, who are pre-feminist in terms of having any of the benefits re outlook on work. equality - initiated, encouraged these changes where women now aspire to any occupation, are protected by law so to do, and where there are now reservations, consequences (eg, re to have children at all, re who gives the essential nurture, care) need to be examined as part of the rethink on work. I will not have a traditional retirement, neither will many of the women over 45 who do not have permanent jobs, and to have (as I do) probably a high level

£ of social savvy, to be able to manage a household, but to face not having the economic means to do that, it is I can assure you, scary — there are obviously relativities, and the economic need is not as acute for all of the unemployed people, but we have an aversion to looking clinically at means, so I suspect the outlook for me is to be bleak, I do not have much confidence in the capacity of the politics as now practised, I think politics is a barrier, to the dispassionate, intelligent examination of what have become political footballs! I thus ask all of you to put the party politics aside, and to work much more inclusively, by example, as our representatives — to provide us some more integrated socio-economic policy-making in consultation with the unemployed people who are (I'd suggest by any measure) an underclass, who are socially and economically impoverished, socially excluded... don't we need to recognise that to have radical reform (the economic reforms are radical) has to include radical social reform, to ensure we match our social aspirations to the means of producing the wealth... what is destructive (and to be unemployed in the traditional way is largely destructive to the lives we had) needs to be rethought, changed... we have now a vicious downward spiral experienced by some, while others conspicuously have luxury, and it's the consumer dream we are encouraged to see as our

1 standard... poverty (the circa \$9,000 per annum "lifestyle") means no car, no home computer, no theatre subscriptions, nor really capacity to give to charities: it means a level of anxiety over basics of life, over whether there will be enough if anything goes wrong - courses that could lead maybe to jobs are unaffordable - no nest-egg - burden word of it is in human terms, to be on the margins, to be the "burden" - to be outsiders, mere percentages...

The ambivalence lies (me to make this submission at all) in the fact that I could present (with a PC etc) a slick, much more considered case, for all sorts of schemes work study, attention, but the irony is that "the unemployed" can become an industry, where others have paid work because we exist - as with Aborigines, so now for me too, the studies are done excluding us, are done of us, and it made a mockery in UK of the (workwhile and in all nonetheless) social exclusion unit (of new Labour's fame) when it was discovered it included not one socially excluded person: I suspect the offices of leaders do not employ - as trainees even - from the ranks of especially the older unemployed people - I'd wager that none of the Cabinet has a person who is out of work advising him or her, so the gap is here, the same as it was for Aborigines... I relate it to that because I experienced knowing about how hard it was, how

10 It takes a lot of courage to speak out, to challenge the status quo, to risk even more exclusion, as so the society can come to regard people by secondhand knowledge (sic) ... This is the danger, for everyone out of work, because the traditional view does still inform the leadership, the outlook is all in terms of to get jobs, as if this old world can somehow be restored when it is in part gone ... I am out of work (hence income, living wage) because the economy can not only thrive but be extremely wealthy without my labour — and I cannot (I don't have any other citizenship etc) easily go (to be homeless) elsewhere, either within Australia, or anywhere — it is problematic too, whether human beings can be as flexible, I'd say we need a strong foundation, home, relationships to begin to have maturity and to be mentally and physically at our peak — It becomes easy to see how many now want to pause, have unease about change... I'll include a selection of enclosures, and I'll ask for indulgence of the Committee, in that I have provided very roughly and not at all attractively what only scratches the surface... It's the pits, being out of work, being also (at 53) in the prime of life, and it's also tough a reality bite: we had (post-war) a short period of the equality that gave us (especially post-war children, born 40s, 50s, 60s) a widespread sort of prosperity, and we now live more with the return of the pre-war reality, where there's the rich,

If and the poor, and it's also likewise globally... There's no human historical reference to suggest we the poor now can anticipate that the rich will be other than caught up with getting richer, and only if there is a commitment by all of us, Australians, to restore a middle Australia can I see hope, especially hope for the older people, for anyone poor... if the society (and that includes the economy) is measured by its weakest link, we have third world growth underpinning the affluence, we have increased poverty, eroding the old middle class, and we have no collective (cross-party) political will to tackle the poverty. That's how I see it, experience it.

Thank you, in the hope that consideration will be given to taking oral evidence, a thing I would welcome a chance to do, and I hope two ways to include (consult) the unemployed people in policy development will be tried - there could be adapting of to have juries of us (with a fee, a reasonable idea), and we could be better matched to mentors (business, vocational) through more contact with the mainstream (including, possibly, for financial assessment, with banks) - the current programs have tended to isolate, to classify people in broad ways, to create possibly poor (in market terms) businesses, where unemployment leads only to the lower echelon (often now very insecure, plus low paid) work being considered, and it certainly is my view that the CES had a function

12 we've been remiss to get completely -
And now political imperatives could
mean we do not (collaboratively,
constructively critically) assess the new
radical shifts, but rather the attitude
will be the status quo one, where
unemployed people are reluctant to
be critical, the link with to have
income support leads to a fear of
biting the hand that feeds (so people also
fear to say it's not enough, unlike when
labour can be a bargaining chip, and
workers can get pay rises etc).

I am willing to discuss any of the material,
at any time, because I consider there
has been a decade or so where too
little has been discussed, and I hope there
will be, via this inquiry, a redress, and
a rethink.

Anne Monteen

ANNE MONTEN

26 April 1999.