

Bruce Dawson  
14 Maritime Court  
Victoria Point QLD 4165

## **ISSUES SPECIFIC TO WORKERS OVER 45 YEARS OF AGE SEEKING EMPLOYMENT, OR ESTABLISHING A BUSINESS, FOLLOWING UNEMPLOYMENT**

Following is a brief submission to the above inquiry. It is written from a personal perspective which should give the Committee Members a real rather than theoretical view on the issue. Hopefully this view will assist the Committee to draw up Policies for Government which will help resolve the issues of early unemployment and the subsequent loss to the community at large, of a wealth of skills and experience.

### **Background**

After 24 years work with the one organisation, with sixteen years in middle management; I found myself unemployed in 1996 at the age of 46. Shortly after I was offered a position with an organisation I had dealt with over the preceding years. Following a drop in workload I was made redundant.

It took me some six months to gain work despite submitting numerous applications for positions for which I was well qualified. I gained contract work which I continued with until gaining a 'permanent position' in January 1998 this position lasted until December 1998 when I was again made redundant due to a drop in sales in Australia and exports - a case of last on first off. Since then I have gained some short term contract work.

The first positions I gained were through people who knew me and were in a position to assist. The short term contract work has been gained through an employment agency.

Of the positions I have been interviewed for there appear to be some common themes when one receives advice of not being successful. This is in cases where a letter has been sent or where I have made a phone call seeking the outcome of the interview.

The common themes are:-

you were at the interview to make up numbers, this is implied through cursory questioning, interviewers reading through information not connected with the job etc;

a letter informing you that there was a wide range of qualified applicants and unfortunately on this occasion you were not successful;

on phoning I have had the comment that 'you appear to be over qualified and we thought you would get bored'; and 'nobody thought you would stay if you got the position!'; and

these comments often come when you go for what could be termed a 'junior position' to what one had before. When one goes for a similar level of position to what one had before, the comments are often around the theme of you have been out of it for a while now.

In all the above one can only assume that there may be hidden agendas. It is hard to come to grips with being rejected for a position that one could undertake with ease. This rejection leads to all sorts of soul searching and self questioning.

On a few occasions I have been able to get feedback from people known to me within the organisation concerned confirming that I had been interviewed to make up numbers; or that there was a real fear that if selected I would not stay but would move on quickly. Unfortunately no one will say these things publicly.

The question here is what does one do - I am at least fortunate in that I have been able to get temporary work and hopefully something permanent will flow on from this. Unfortunately budgeting and temporary work do not make good friends.

### **Comment**

It appears that the best solution for this problem might be to focus those in the public arena on the downside of the practices of downsizing, rightsizing; and maximising profits at the cost of jobs.

There are many organisations now that have significantly increased profits but in so doing have lost large numbers of employees, now give low standards of service to customers, have lost corporate memory and the goodwill of the public etc.

If society and business in Australia function under the -Aegis of Government and Government sets the framework under which business can operate; it would appear that Government has a wider responsibility to the social and family structure of Australia.

Perhaps Government needs to link social objectives in to its economic policies, for if business is allowed to put profit before people; who will bear the cost of the social problems arising from these profit driven policies?

The social problems arising from the practices of downsizing, rightsizing; and maximising profits include unemployment, family break up, the loss of experience and skills to the nation, frustration felt by many with the continuing decline in many services - services provided by both the private and public sector.

What encouragement is there for our youth to study achieve when they see so many people at their most productive years thrown on the scrap heap?

Rather than dwell on my own situation, I have made some suggestions that could be used as a basis for new policies to tackle unemployment.

### **Policy Options**

The first step to assist those over 45 get back in the work force is to convince potential employers that this group of persons still has a lot to offer - experience, corporate memory, management and organisational skills etc.

Policies which might slow down or stop the number of redundancies occurring could include the creation of an employment tax which would penalise businesses for displacing staff through redundancy; such a penalty could be linked to the social security benefits that the Government would pay out. I recognise that there are circumstances where this could cause a business to go bankrupt and thus be counterproductive (in these case the penalty would be held over until such time as it could be collected) however such businesses would be in a minority.

Secondly a policy that might facilitate employment would be to give businesses a 'tax break' when they increase employment over the previous years threshold number of employees such a 'tax break' would have to be monitored closely; and made sufficiently high to have any effect the aim would be to encourage the creation of real positions not those to gain a tax break to be effective. A side benefit would be the

encouragement of new businesses. The funding for this tax break would come 'from the foregone Social Security payments and other less tangible costs to the community that flow from unemployment.

Whether or not these suggestions are taken up or not is not the issue. The issue is that existing policies and those of the past are not effective; hence Government needs to develop new and well thought out policies that have different but equally as important objectives as the current obsession by businesses and Government with profits and surpluses (*perhaps these policies are the neutron bomb of economic rationalism*).

If such new and well thought out policies focussed on creating employment were introduced; it would demonstrate to all in the community that unemployment of any age group is not a viable option for Australia.