

Submission to:-
HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES
Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations

**“Inquiry into Issues Specific to Older Workers Seeking Employment,
Or Establishing a Business, Following Unemployment”**

Introduction

I am making a submission to this inquiry because specifically, I fall into the abovementioned category, also because of my general interest in social, political and current affairs and I believe these are issues in need of serious attention.

In order to lend relevance and weight to the propositions I put forward, but also I hope, to qualify and create a ‘human face’ for these notions, I am attaching my curriculum vitae which provides quite a degree of personal information as well as a comprehensive rundown on my employment history and experience.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Family

I married a wonderful woman relatively late in life (42), and we have been blessed with two marvelous boys now aged 7 and five. I now consider the principal purpose of my life to be my family.

Financial Position

I lost virtually everything I had through a failed business venture, in the form of a partnership in the development of a guesthouse property. This was around the period of 1988 when loan funds were all too readily available. Like many others, I went into this venture under capitalised, and when the bubble burst and it became clear we could not service the debt. My principal assets of home and a separate small rural property were realised to meet my commitments. Shortly thereafter, I sustained a serious injury in a parachuting incident and I experienced the first of two short periods without full time work.

Ultimately therefore, I brought virtually nothing in the way of material assets to my marriage. As my wife was divorced from a previous marriage she too had little equity. This meant that I was starting married and family life in my early forties, with less than a person may have expected to have in their early twenties. (My wife is 12 years younger than I am).

Recent Past

Since June 1997, after 18 months of solid efforts to find employment, principally in the Bendigo district but also further afield, we were forced to the position of deciding whether my wife should return to primary teaching from which she had been on maternity leave. It was always our intention that she would remain home until both the boys had started school. (our youngest Lachy, suffers 'a hole in the heart' condition as well as a number of other minor complications which affected his early development and added to our determination that he would not start school until age 6, i.e. next year).

Clearly the obvious option was a "role swap". Whilst to many, this is quite natural and even desired, it was not our preferred choice. We certainly acknowledge though that we are very fortunate to in fact *have a choice*. This however is not the point when considering the social impact of unemployment on an older age group.

Disillusionment

Because we were raised, and matured, during periods when "full employment" was not uncommon, our understanding was that,:-

“provided one acquired skills and abilities better than or equal to 'the next person in the line', then finding a reasonable job would not be overly difficult.

This was not taken to mean, I should hasten to add, that we took such a position for granted. ***It just meant that we 'knew the score', and as long as we were committed, had a strong work ethic, were loyal, earnest and keen for improvement and personal development, then sound employment and the means to provide for one's family would be readily attainable.***

That this situation has inevitably changed is not the problem.

As someone interested in social, political and current affairs, it was not difficult to detect the changes occurring in the world. These included the decline and subsequent collapse of the Communist system, rapid technological development, the decline of primary and secondary industry in favour of the tertiary sector, growth of the 'world market' and competition, extraordinary developments in communication and information technology and even the inevitable addressing of work practices that were untenable. (The above not necessarily in order and of course much more besides was occurring.)

Clearly there was to be a period of great change in "the way of work". **Surely those with the knowledge and responsibility to foresee these changes and their impact on societies, could have done a much better job, nay any job, in explaining to its people the nature and consequences of this metamorphosis.** Indeed, it is patently clear that the wider population were

neither informed, much less consulted. And so we have social dislocation and turmoil, the real impacts of which, are only just beginning to be felt, and obviously not widely understood.

The Changes in 'Employment Collateral'.

I mentioned earlier some of the requirements and qualities which tended to dictate employment prospects. For example, one would think that someone who had, throughout their working life, displayed strong abilities in successfully taking on new and previously unfamiliar roles and areas of work, who demonstrated diverse skills, initiative, flexibility, leadership, high personal, moral and ethical integrity, strong presentation, sound theoretical comprehension and a natural enthusiasm for work, would always find a reasonable demand for their labour, regardless of changes.

When however, one studies those ' attributes ', which more readily win reliable jobs today, one observes a greater preponderance on:-
" tertiary qualified in appropriate discipline ", " committed to best practice ", " proven performance in allied field ", "strong conceptual, quantitative and economic analysis skills ", and a host of pseudo type and jargon laden phrases. Many of these it needs to be said, relate to genuine, new or evolving commercial and business concepts. But many are simply 'fancy' new ways of describing a wide range of the same general skills, abilities and attributes, with equally 'over the top' and convoluted techniques for judging their existence in a given individual.

This phenomenon has coincided with the " Dawkins plan " for our tertiary institutions, that has seen the qualifications tendered from ' Colleges of Advanced Education ' and ' TAFE ' institutions etc. gain acceptance and credibility, far in excess of their intrinsic worth.

To people around the "45 plus" age group, with strong employment and performance backgrounds, the situation I can tell you, is considered 'a real joke', (if it weren't for many of them, so tragically serious). They see themselves overlooked and bypassed in favour of people who all too often, hardly know how to address people, displaying little ability to hold a decent conversation, and who demonstrate a complete absence of any ability to think latterly. Many are basically ' duds ', albeit on occasion with plenty of facade.

So What Becomes of These "Beyond 45ers"?

Many 'disappear down their burrows', fade out of sight or turn inwards as their confidence erodes and their self-esteem diminishes. Beyond that, the stories and combinations of thoughts and emotions are ' as long as a piece of string '.

Some find and accept something well below their capabilities, and are grateful.

Some adapt (sometimes cynically) to "the new way ".

Others stumble between 'bits and pieces of jobs'.

Many experience long periods of bewilderment as they struggle to come to grips with the changing world and what it is doing to them.

In time some come to grips with " the new way of work " and manage individually, or by restructuring family resources, to re-establish the nature of "their working life".

For many however, I expect this realisation, acceptance and coping, never truly occurs and they 'just get by'. And some don't!

There Is Only One Brand of Unemployed, and That's " Unemployed Youth ".

When someone 'needs the points', wants to 'run-up the unemployment banner' or generally 'rattle the can', there is really only *one sort of unemployed* to talk about. "Youth unemployed". There has been little or no broad attempt to genuinely master **and** mobilise the enormous resource that rests ('rest' being the operative word) in the older aged unemployed.

N.B. I have a terrific anecdote which vividly illustrates this point, but which would be more appropriate to a personal hearing.

Establishing a Business Following Unemployment

Those fortunate enough to be provided a redundancy package, often decide, or find little alternative, to starting a business ("buying a job").

Among the favourites are"- (i) cleaning

(ii) lawn mowing/gardening

(iii) courier transport.

Of course some of these 'get by' and some even prosper, but I suspect the majority not only fail and 'do their dough ', **but leave the legacy of a very negative impact on the industries in which they have dabbled.** Ask around!

' Ridiculing the Sixties '

A favourite pastime these days of many people, is to ridicule the 'sixties era'.

In large part it is a political jibe aimed at the current Prime Minister. However, (regardless of political persuasions), to the many people who had their adolescence and early adulthood during that period, and who subscribe to what they see as the clear and simple values, which found common adherence in those days; such ridicule is symbolic of the devaluation of these people and their ways, as well as of a culture and system **that worked for the majority**, and most honestly believe would also benefit that same majority today.

Globalisation, Economic Rationalism and All That Jazz

When I first started to hear about the concepts of economic rationalism and by extension globalisation, and the offshoots of these doctrines, such Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) etc., I thought they were natural economic, commercial and trade progressions, that were a simple part of the evolutionary processes. I also felt that the 'performance efficiencies', and other processes were a reasonable response to the untenable work practises that were endemic in some industries.

However, as I have observed the implementation of these concepts and their associated processes, a disturbing picture has unfolded.

This is not the forum for the wider discussion of this subject, but it is, to look at and consider the impact of these doctrines and their associated processes on specific groups and the wider society.

Many people, and certainly a lot in the '45 plus' age group, have seen first-hand the impact, where the specific model for gaining "commercial efficiency and increased competitiveness", has been the one which in the main, **'cuts heads off at the ground level'**, whilst largely, upper and senior management, **establish all manner of mechanisms aimed at ensuring their own particular position, whilst masking their own performance and 'real' contribution to the declared measurements of 'efficiency gains'**. It is not to suggest that this group does not also "pay a price" in the pursuit of efficiencies. It is not generally however in the form of their job and livelihood, but rather measured by longer hours and increased stress in coming up (one-way or another) with the 'right' numbers. This is often offset with other benefits and 'perks'.

Whilst from time to time you do hear the odd story about a business or manager that have successfully adopted a genuine 'team' approach to achieving improved operational and bottom line performance, these are the exception and 'downsizing' the more general rule.

Who Is Leading Here?

If you people in power truly believe that economic rationalism, globalisation and their established processes, are the only way for this

country and its societies; then you need to be more forthright, up front and considered in your methods of explaining to people on the ground floor, why this is so, and what government is genuinely doing to mitigate against the resulting impacts.

The social issues are enormous and far-reaching.

Consider for one part however, that if you remove from a group of people, who I believe could be generally shown to be very "cost efficient citizens", i.e. people who by and large have strong moral and ethical codes and have been "net ' contributors" to society: if you remove from them, **the over-riding rule of " fundamental reasoning"**, then I believe you are risking the erosion of a ' key stone ' in the underlying structure which secures an ordered society.

Now if you find that concept a little hard to understand, have a genuine talk with people who fall into this group, and seek from them some real understanding of their frustrations. I strongly believe you will find what could be reasonably characterised as, their witnessing of the "removal of fundamental reasoning " in regards to how much of which surrounds and effects them is occurring, often to their considerable detriment.

In Conclusion

Now if you choose to disregard this submission as the ramblings of a cynical, disgruntled and disaffected individual, to seek out "more comfortable reasonings" for your report, then things will go on as they seem ordained, and you will not be able to come up with any real answers, because you haven't seen the questions!

Consider all the statistics and related information on people who take the time and trouble to make submissions to inquiries such as this. That is, outside those executives and consultants paid to do so. I certainly haven't made a submission to an inquiry of this nature before. My point is, that you need to adopt strategies and actions that will get you much closer to people, and in range of some of their real angst concerning all the ramifications surrounding unemployment for the "45 plus" age group. You'll find most of them silently withering down their burrows!

Footnote.

For the record, and so I am not so easily dismissed as simply " a cynical, disgruntled and disaffected individual ", I personally, certainly at this time, am relaxed and at peace with my own particular 'lot', "working in the role as a " Mr Mum ". This enables me to spend very valuable time with one of the lights of my life, whilst contributing to the general well being and happiness of my family. It is however, analogous to asking the rhinoceros at an open plain zoo

*"look how good it is for you!, wide open spaces, three meals a day provided, all these odd humans visiting daily. What more could you want?
Rhinoceros: -- " yeah, it's not bad is it? But it is not the jungle! "*

['jungle ' here referring to the natural environment and order of things, not the 'work jungle' context.]

" They are playing a game,
They are playing at not playing a game.
If I show them I see they are,
I shall break the rules and they will punish me.
Therefore, I must play their game, of not seeing, I see the game."

"Knots" by R.D. Laing.

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