

27 April 1999

2 Ross Street  
Plympton Pt SA 503

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

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT  
EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS  
29 APR 1999  
RECEIVED

Dear Sir / Madam,

Re: Inquiry into issues specific to older workers.  
Letter April 19, submission April 27 ANNE MONTEN

This letter is to provide some additional comment  
on age: in employment, there is a focus  
on the two age groups where people  
experience most difficulty in getting work  
(where too those who do get jobs often get  
low paid, casual work, not sustaining  
a livelihood, etc): 15-25 year olds, and  
45 plus, so we have youth (around  
a third?) and older people experiencing  
exclusion from mainstream work, by  
which I mean sustained work that  
brings a sustainable income. Hasn't this  
now become a pattern, flowing from  
economic changes (along with social  
change, especially the aim to have  
equality for women)? Isn't our society  
now developing with a pool of young  
unemployed people / under-employed,  
and at around middle age, the  
same pattern exists? \*

\* which adds up to a class, excluded  
socially, economically, the under-  
employed  
new economic  
world

With the April 27 submission, I included  
copy of a New Statesman article (a  
further copy is attached). I did so  
because it captures the flavour of  
attitudes to age. Through a gift,  
I was able to visit to UK in early 1998,

on what I regard as a steady tour where I could compare experiences here, and of course the economic changes and social ones do equate.

It is not new, discrimination on the basis of age. I was discounted from a job in early 70s, considered too young to have what was a management type position (in Neake, which I was keen to be in), and the controversial poster returned to did give rise to much conversation (including about the age-old truth that the attractive - cruel though it is - sex preferred too, so old and grey is out, you can buy the youthful face, then that puts the means - money - as an advantage, which it is), but we also have, do we not, the fact of the 80s, 90s revolution, which is less jobs, less career-type openings, in a more streamlined, efficient economy, which is the aim, and we have none of those middle level white collar jobs now, so are we not trying to fit a round peg into a square hole, are we not approaching a new, revolutionising workplace with old attitudes, where the expectations (of the young and the old) are stuck in the old mould in a time where all of it is unravelling... are we afraid to confront the realities that are faced, full-on, by especially the people left out, be we young, or at the other end.

It is the lack of confronting reality that I find a contrast with contemporary Britain, or in fact with

perhaps the course in today's  
Australia, there's an impotence,  
a state of denial is widespread,  
a lack of leadership in terms  
of social vision, an obsessively  
economic focus (quantitatively  
not qualitatively, based on  
numbers, one-dimensional, and I  
would contend dehumanising  
all of us)

3 every other place / people where I've enjoyed time, developed friendships, worked.

To get a new job at 45 is to invite, realistically all you must be joking. Ageism, in work and out of it is a significant area of discrimination, a form of prejudice encountered probably by most of us in some way or other. Age is a criterion for the working holiday visa; and as I could have got a job but for age in London, early 1998 (thereby possibly having a better quality of life for possibly two years), it is one area where maybe the governments could lift the age barrier, given that through his scheme we gain, globalising is cultural, social, not only about market economics, but there is resistance, to discussing ideas that do not conform to the rigid tunnel vision, which puts a job, conventional (rational) central: the fact of life is that there are not entry level jobs available, there are now some people who form a more secure workforce, where there are career paths, and increasingly the span is diminishing, etc, so there are redundancies taken by older people, there's downsizing, it's a continuing pattern, then there's not enough positions overall - we are failing to grasp the pattern, I submit, a pattern now more clearly defined, and because there are entrenched pools of both unemployed people and working poor at either side of a core of workers - say of 26-44 - why can't we look much more

2 integrated way, so the imperative becomes how to survive with whatever is actually the bird in the hand, and if it is in poverty, as it is for me, it gets down to lack of job as lack of any extra money, lack of savings, insecurities galore about basic living, hand-to-mouth, etc. ... to believe in the current climate that I will have a job and increased income is as pie-in-the-sky as to believe I could rely on winning a lottery (the fact that many poor people, plus disgruntled workers play the lotteries shows how we tend to escape from reality too.)

There is an (irrational?) aversion to social planning, as if economic growth alone guarantees a healthy society, people sneer at "social engineering", yet when it comes to economics, there's no qualms about radical "engineering" — there's an imbalance?

Enclosed are some more clippings, all of which impinge on the topics you are to address, I hope with participation of many unemployed people but I suspect many will be unaware of the existence of this inquiry, thus it could remain a rarefied exercise, when the articles will remain stuck, tunnel-visioned, which is

4 objectively at it all, look at it as do corporate planners, but look (as is not the case) in human terms, at the working culture, at all of our old assumptions. It is the human dimension that is I think sidelined, by fellow human beings too... It is now significant to have a job by mid-20s, and as the late 80s young get older, there is a split, like two castes, and there is at 45 plus a similar split, where some of my peers (including my two 45 plus siblings) have jobs that are both lucrative and rewarding while others are on the outside, competing in effect with the young for the leftover type work, for work that often wastes the skills, education and for older people the often considerable experience - but there are enough mid 20s to mid 30s to do all the good jobs, and we have a small population, only about 18.75 million, we are not able easily to shift from city to city (only the relatively rich can do so), and I agree with those who advocate increased migration, if it brings an influx of young people to a place half dead (the per capita incomes of Adelaide households put around half in poverty, it is a dying place, not only the chronological age, it's the psychology, and the lack of opportunities that allow growth, advancement are a big part of it all.)

There are the demographic changes ahead, and it could be worth looking at how to alter our approach,

dispelled... politically rough,  
e who are out of work are  
without any power, and although  
hope there is a recognition  
in those who "have" of change,  
I am not at all optimistic, I think  
the 80s, 90s has bred more  
greed, there's a focus on  
self, a new individualism  
shaped not by enlightened  
thought but consumer driven -  
Now I think the old, especially  
old and poor, will be left, the  
expectation is that the government  
provides adequately -  
There's already chronically  
isolated (in suburbia where  
most live) people, a fracturing  
society, where the time is not  
given to human relationships,  
there has been a constant rise in  
social neglect, a decline in  
capacity to communicate, over the  
past couple of decades.

As the number of young  
unemployed could diminish  
(lower birth rates), that could  
resolve the youth exclusion  
(from work, and adult  
independence) in years ahead,  
and the old, we will die,  
still not needed to create  
wealth. - Not a random  
thought. - older people could be  
engaged as the social workers/  
mentors in his period  
where there is upheaval, but  
nothing much is looked at in any

5 at a welfare system that re-assesses assistance to those over 45, that recognises the new patterns, and looks to how to have constructive occupations (new work, eg a new approach to the national defence, to reserves for the forces, to provide maybe a civil service component, provide thereby basic training to all citizens, but we have - I did moot an idea, early 90s - an old guard type military; here is a fixated attitude to conscription, again a narrowness prevails)

It is, I submit, the consequent poverty (plus the fear of impoverishment) that is central, and that poverty is not currently fully acknowledged: to lose a job, or to be unable to find one, have one, on a regular basis, for any adult Australian is to be poorer, and here is a herd world, of people excluded from the mainstream economy, a falling standard of living accompanies it, and simply, we without an above poverty income have a raft of disadvantages, set alongside the still clearly very affluent who are the ones, largely, who have career type jobs, jobs with perks, but what is here is the livelihood, the capacity to plan, have holidays, and so on, to have security (insurance, save via superannuation, have choices re health, education via capacity to pay)

The threat is ever present of reduction/



- of an employers' market, coupled with the radical changes where the whole concept of work is altering, so what a person expected at 20, based on what parents and society expected too, is now at odds with reality.

Now, the peak time for work is 25-40. There is (with increased life expectancy, potential to be fitter, more healthy in middle, old age) a generation (the war-babies, 40s children and older) of knowledge, skills being sidelined as the average working life shrinks - so today, unless you are around 25-40, it is not only difficult to get paid work, but to get credit, to save, to insure, to get housing. So maybe the government - and the society as a whole - should tackle ageism, encourage more mixed age workplaces, otherwise for swags of Australia's young and middle aged plus, here is the new kind world, to become fringe dwellers, isolated, then who will be surprised (the affluent caste, I suppose) at the cost of it all, at not only the cost of income support, but of anti-social trends, like the ravages of addiction, to alcohol or to drugs, to gambling, of the poorer nutrition that will compromise the health of young and old - the myth that people do not want to work ought to be quickly

to withdrawal of income support, and it creates an angst ever-present, compounded for those who can assess their chances of getting work as low, etc. It is economic deprivation, to be unemployed, unless there is a compensatory redundancy package or additional sources of support other than the reliance on benefit/pension - the likelihood that statistics used underestimate the extent of the un/under-employment is another source of unease.

To sort it all out, to begin to have constructive approaches needs, I continue to plead, a comprehensive inquiry that examines wealth distribution, welfare, and all the aspects of employment, so that leads me to suggest to the government a royal commission, to enable us to extract employment from politics, and I ask again for politicians - as our representatives - to put this issue about politics (refer please to editorial, The Australian 29/9/98).

In the letter sent with the submission, 26 April 1999, I refer to having high blood pressure, and I suspect it could be elevated as I write, and I have other friends who have anxiety over the social changes, plus the economic shifts, there is a huge overall uncertainty, we face the daily exposure to war, to violations of human rights, and we face here in Australia more violence,

PTO

7 breakdowns, and one breakdown is about work, involves radical changes where employment requires people to compromise about values... we have not discussed it openly, there's a lot of stigmas, a lot of stereotyping, a lot of skimming over the surface, and when people are under heat (as many in jobs are), generosity can be a casualty, it is now much more a dog-eat-dog work culture, it is one where many in it, but for the money, would get out - there's a perverse envy that can arise, of people out, one which quickly excludes the money... we have over-worked people in jobs, scared to say they are in effect now doing what they ought to do, all to create efficiency - no-one wants to be poor though, so there's a more vicious atmosphere.

If the market (labour one) needed the people, there would be a commitment from industry/commerce, but the culture has evolved in a way that now employers expect perfect fits, many graduate trainee programs have been cut out, or cut down, there is now no social commitment to the worker, ill-health can mean end of a job, we have the imbalance (since mid to late 70s)