## Submission: The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations - <u>"Inquiry into issues specific to workers over</u> <u>45 years of age seeking employmenf</u>

The wonderful part of this whole sorry tale is that workers over forty-five have no reason to believe that they are being discriminated against until they attempt to find a job, consequently they are blithely unaware of the axe poised above them. I would never have believed the level of covert discrimination at play in the workplace unless I had experienced it personally

To suggest that choice played any part in my decision to work for myself in small business is simply ludicrous. I certainly did not choose to be made redundant, and given my choice I would certainly prefer to be enjoying the benefits associated with the senior position which I had worked so hard and long to attain.

Until my being made redundant I was an individual who had worked the mandatory sixty hour week for over twenty years forgoing many family and social activities to reach a position of national product management with a multinational company. I was made redundant at the whim of a consultant whose sole claim to fame was that he had single-handedly wiped out the multinational's British operation. We Australians can be so utterly naive in our blind acceptance that only a foreign "expert" can possibly know, identify and fix a problem! Witness the slavish following by Treasury of the drivel taught by the Harvard School of Management.

The strength of the Australian psyche has always been that we are a "can do" society, our ability to fix complex systems with rudimentary tools under the most adverse conditions is legendary. It is unfortunate, therefore, that we get so little opportunity to fix anything. In our pursuit of the great goal of increased productivity (which equates to less Australian jobs and more in South East Asia) we have systematically destroyed the Australian manufacturing base and hence the eradicated need to fix anything.

We seem to have been incapable of learning from the historical practices of dominant economies. When the British occupied India the very first thing they did was to destroy the prevalent system of manufacture and distribution of goods and services, they then embraced and reinforced the caste system as a means to maintain social division. The parallel between "Rust belt Australia" with pre-industrial revolution India and the caste system with the effect of the social division caused by the gambling led **redistribution** of wealth is too easily drawn.

In 1993 I was made redundant, I spent nearly twelve months searching for employment. I	
was repeatedly told that:	I was too senior for the position,
	or overqualified,
	or that some other candidate's profile more accurately filled
	the requirements of the positions for which I applied.

All of the reasons given equate to "**TOO OLD TO BE ANY VALUE WHATSOEVER!**" The euphemisms simply sidestep the accusation that employment policies as espoused by employment agencies (generally) are heavily discriminatory in practice if not by definition under the Anti-discrimination Act. The prospect of anyone coining forward to bring suit under the Act is most unlikely for fear of being blackballed by the industry which controls the allocation of employment.

To suggest that prevalent attitudes are anything but discriminatory is farcical, exempting people from work on the basis of race, creed, disability or colour is discrimination but to exempt someone on the basis of their "over-qualification" is not, surely over qualification is some sort of disability, after all one has no control over how smart one is.

I reactivated a small consultancy company which I had set up some years earlier and for the next six years have scratched and eked out a living as a freelance electrical engineer at a greatly reduced income.

Obstacles which I have met along the way are, the high cost in time and money to comply to standards which any small businessman would regard as necessary for survival. Quality assurance compliance costs more than many small businesses turn over in their first year, it is not on a sliding scale and as such is a significant impediment to competition by small companies. Licensing, legal and insurance costs are proportionately higher as a function of turn over for small business. The sum of the impediments to free competition are significantly weighted against the small business in spite of the often stated knowledge of the government that small business is the greatest employer and trainer of workers. From my own experience I can categorically state that small business is about getting things done and getting paid. The need to maintain turnover dictates the survival of all small business.

I had a chance meeting with an associate a few months ago, I jumped into a cab in the city and the driver was a fellow with whom I had worked some fifteen years ago - My old workmate was one of the best electronics engineers in the State, his talent was recognised across Australia, what awful failure had brought this eminently qualified and able individual so low?

## He failed to disobey nature's law, he could requalify 'til he was blue in the face but he'd turned fifty and that, in Australia today, ladies and gentlemen is a sentence!

Older workers are not looking for a handout, all we want is a fair go!

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