



INDEPENDENT  
INQUIRY into  
**Insecure Work**

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<b>Age</b>	70	<b>Gender</b>	Female	<b>State</b>	NSW
<b>Occupation (if available)</b>		Retired university lecturer/tutor			
<b>Text of submission</b>		<p>I am now 70 years old, divorced, with three adult children. I once owned a hovel in an suburb that became gentrified, sold the place for a motza and moved further west. So today, with a paid-off roof over my head, I am in a good situation. I also have chickens and a garden, no car and a thrifty nature, and thus am able to live on the aged pension -- although this is not what I had planned to do. I had wanted to go on working as a casual in the university where I loved being with the students and was regarded by them as a very good teacher. Until I was 63 years old, teaching was my main source of income, since with age it became increasingly difficult to pick up jobs in my own industry, the industry that had given me the valuable hands-on experience to pass on to the students.</p> <p>For me and the many other casuals in our department, our employment was always precarious. It depended on the good will of the full-timers who had left our industry with the expansion of academia some years previously and had gained secure permanent university positions.</p> <p>Casuals were never secure. We never knew until right before the semester started whether or not we would be asked to work again or what we would teach. And then, once we were awarded the job, we faced a mad scramble of preparation for whatever course was allocated to us. After that, we beavered away during our 13 weeks of teaching until the holidays came (with no pay) and the uncertainty about the next semester began all over again.</p> <p>We all were very aware of how easy it would be to replace us, as there were so many other under-employed and unemployed people in our industry which had become totally freelance (ie casual) by the 1980s. So personally I felt very grateful to be employed at the uni, working every semester for thirteen years.</p> <p>However, I was less grateful when government funding to the university started to decrease, and, gradually, so did the pay and conditions for the casuals. We were the weakest link and every year, the screws were being tightened on us just that little bit more.</p>			

Eventually, the casuals across a number of departments started to meet together (discreetly) to see what could be done. The union tried to help us, but operated under an enterprise agreement which did little to protect casuals. The full time lecturers didn't actively support us -- in part because they had become so overworked themselves and had no time. But also because they were getting what was (to us at least) relatively huge salaries and for fairly classic reasons didn't want to rock the boat.

Costs had to be cut -- that much was clear to everyone -- but it did seem unjust to cut costs at the expense of those who were already being paid so much less. That much should also have been clear. -- but the message wasn't getting through. We needed to speak up for ourselves.

My friends, the other casuals, warned me that we would have to be very careful about this or we wouldn't be employed again and because of the seasonal nature of the employment (that is, semester by semester), there would be no way to demonstrate that we were being discriminated against for speaking out. The union really couldn't help -- and in any case, as I said to the others, all any union official has time to do is to help those who are willing to help themselves. We would have to stick together and help ourselves. Moreover, I said optimistically, although the full-timers weren't willing to actively support us, they were our friends and colleagues, and having hired us semester after semester, surely wouldn't side with management when we were so obviously being deprived of proper pay and conditions. But a counter argument was put by one of the casuals who had been there longer than me. She recalled that Mr. X had not been rehired some years previously after speaking out about something and her observation carried the day. No one was willing to take our case to the management -- except me. Of course, I was buoyed up by my faith in human nature but, perhaps more so, to be honest, by the knowledge that I was by then old enough to get the aged pension, if worse came to worst. And so off I trotted to the management to tell them how we felt. But costs really did have to be cut; our point of view was considered uneconomic and an annoyance.

And sure enough, not long after that, I was told that next semester there would be - for the first time in 13 years -- no work for me. However, I think this was intended as a slap on the wrist -- that I was regarded as a good teacher who needed just a little demonstration of the realities of life -- because the semester after that I was, in fact, asked back to teach again once more.

Of course, I declined the offer. Having learned to be so incredibly thrifty in my paid-off house, I had by then discovered that, yes, I was able to live on the pension and by renting out rooms and was happy doing so.

But the question remains: would I have spoken up if I didn't have a paid-off house or if those who advocate raising the retirement age to 70 had had their way? I'd like to think that I would have -- but I can't say that I have actually been tested. Not everyone is so fortunate as to have been

	<p>driven from their suburb by gentrification into the arms of low-level financial security or to know how to raise chooks and grow vegetables.</p> <p>And how do I feel about it now? I may have been lucky to get my job but, given my circumstances, I was equally lucky to have lost it. However, as I look around, I see fewer and fewer people who find it as easy to live as I do and this includes my former teaching colleagues who are feeling less than enthusiastic about their second class status as permanently casual workers and must cling on to the pay and conditions they are given in order to pay their rent or their mortgages.</p>
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*This submission was received online at the Inquiry's web site:*  
<http://securejobs.org.au/independent-inquiry-into-insecure-work-in-australia/>

*Certain information, including full contact details, have been withheld to respect the privacy of the submitter. Further details about the publication of submissions and a privacy statement are available at the website.*