



INDEPENDENT
INQUIRY into
Insecure Work

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Online submission					
First name	Gabrielle		Surname	Whitehead	
Age		Gender	Female	State	VIC
Occupation (if available)		Personal assistant			
Text of submission		<p>I would like to draw your attention to a very serious problem regarding the status of casual employment. I will use my personal experience to serve as an example; however there are thousands of others suffering a similar plight.</p> <p>I am currently employed as a casual Personal Assistant, contracted by Manpower for IBM. I work five days per week, eight hours per day, exactly like regular full-time employment. My hourly rate is \$23.84. I do not receive any benefits such as sick leave, annual leave, or holiday pay. The 30 minute „lunch break“ is not included in my wage; however, I am actually at work for 40 hours per week.</p> <p>Manpower has stipulated that I take 22 days unpaid annual leave sometime during the year, at a time designated by them, for “health and recreation” purposes. Whilst taking a break for health and recreation is a good thing, this is not the real purpose behind the enforced “leave”. According to legislation, no employer is allowed to employ a person as a casual for a continuous 12 months. In fact, after only six months, it is recommended that the person be transferred to regular, full-time employment.</p> <p>From this \$23.84 hourly rate, it is expected that it is enough money from which to set aside some funds to cover for lack of income on public holidays, for days off work due to sickness and to provide for (enforced) 'annual leave'. This is not possible, as the weekly income just covers my mortgage, fuel, food and small bills, such as phone and insurance. Electricity, gas and our rates are paid by instalments. I rarely buy clothes or spend money on any form of entertainment from my weekly pay as most weeks there is barely anything left over after meeting the commitments. We can never go to the dentist. As I have a dependent husband, I am the sole income earner for our household. By government and statistical standards, our status is considered a low income household; however, we no longer qualify for a Health Care Card because I earn \$480 (gross) over the Centrelink threshold. This threshold has been lowered since I began this employment in April 2011. From April 2011 to November 2011, I qualified for a health care card. Now, I do not. My income has not changed, but the Centrelink threshold has.</p> <p>It bemuses us to see so-called “expert economists” say that people are “saving” when the economy is slowing down. This is not true; people are</p>			

	<p>NOT saving, it is simply a case of people not having any spare income to spend. The only time we can spend with relative freedom to buy a few clothes and pay our yearly vehicle registration is at tax time, when I receive my income tax refund.</p> <p>There is always much talk in the media about “growth” and the “economy” by the government of the day. But it seems to me that the more time any government spends in bed, pillow-talking with various business and corporations, it always results in workers losing their rights. I do not understand how no-one in government thus far has joined the dots regarding the increasing casualisation of the Australian workforce and the resulting negative impact on the economy.</p> <p>Back in the „good old days“ when people had permanent, full-time jobs with annual leave and holiday loading, (as well as sick leave and sick pay), workers were able to go on annual holidays with their families, usually visiting somewhere interesting within Australia, and their children were educated in the process by having memorable experiences and an appreciation of their beautiful country. Now in 2011, the supposedly modern age, we have people who cannot afford to take time off because they will not get paid; our tourism industry is suffering for lack of visitors – (and this should not just be blamed on a lack of overseas visitors) – my point is that for many generations of Australians past, it was normal to visit and holiday in another part of Australia, often making new friendships and associations in the process. It was a very Australian thing to do.</p> <p>This year, in one month alone, 30,000 full-time jobs were lost. In the same month, 30,000 new casual jobs were gained. The same jobs are re-classified by greedy corporations and businesses who want to increase their profits at the expense of workers. The working poor are no longer Mexican immigrants in the US, they are average Australians!</p> <p>When there is no possibility of a firm commitment by the employer toward the employee, then work truly becomes a form of slavery.</p> <p>For the people of Australia to be able to spend money and thereby contribute to stimulating the economy, there has to be the money and the time available to do so. Casual workers rarely have “disposable income” on which to use on the basics like shoes and clothing, hairdressing, entertainment and so on. We cannot afford to take time off because it will cost us dearly in loss of income, so we cannot have our holidays - our respite - because we do not have enough money to self-fund our annual leave. I am certain that it is due to the increase of casual workers in the Australian workforce which is creating the slump in retail sales, and the economy in general.</p> <p>The Age reported on Monday July 25, 2011 - “More retail woes: Premier [company] shuts 50 fashion shops”. More people unemployed equals less market stimulation. Australia does not operate as a “free market” system. For a market to be „free“, walking away from a bad deal has to be an option. Any market that doesn't offer that option isn't free.</p> <p>When a person can only choose between “casual” employment (which benefits the employer and not the employee), and unemployment, then</p>
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	<p>this is not a 'free market'.</p> <p>Of course a person will take the employment option every time, even though it is a bad deal. No one willingly wants to be poor and living on the street. We will no longer tolerate this situation. Already we have the beginnings of an unhealthy condition whereby the younger generation currently in this type of workforce think it is normal, when in fact, it is not normal. It is a very unhealthy way to live as it causes a great deal of financial, emotional and psychological stress, especially in times of sickness and unpaid public holidays. This is not the way forward; in fact, it is a backward step into the early industrial age where workers were disposable and undervalued.</p> <p>We must stop the normalising of an erroneous working status. I have spoken to all people in my workplace and others elsewhere who are casual employees; I have asked them whether they would be willing to make a stand against the casual work status. All declined on the basis that if a protest was to be organised, they would not risk taking time off to go, because they would lose pay, and they also harboured a fear of losing their job entirely. My response to them was that therein lays the trap - cleverly set up by corporations and big business and sanctioned by the government - which we all have fallen into. Because casual workers stand to lose financially when we take time off, and we risk losing our jobs, this is exactly the position corporations and businesses generally want us to be in. Slavery is when you have lost your freedoms. Slavery is when you are denied the ability to stand up for your rights for to do so would cause a painful, financial loss to you. Slavery is suffering financially just because you have the „flu.</p> <p>Slavery is not being paid annual leave, so you cannot afford to take leave to be with your family, doing healthy family things. Why is the government supporting slavery in Australia in 2011? Because the government does not care about its citizens. It only cares about big business.</p> <p>CASUAL WORK IS A FORM OF SLAVERY WHICH MUST BE ABOLISHED.</p> <p>People who work full time – Monday to Friday – 8 hours per day – on a 6 month (or longer) contract - should NEVER be classified as casual. This is full-time employment. This is the employment I am in currently, on a 12 month contract. Yet I have no rights and no respite. I work when I am sick, because I cannot afford to lose pay. I suffer financially due to public holidays, for which I am not paid, yet I am not allowed to work. I cannot afford to set aside funds to cover those times. The working poor now exist in Australia and I am no longer proud to call Australia home. It is not the lucky country any more. I eagerly await the outcome from the independent inquiry.</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.