



Online submission					
First name	Ewen		Surname	Kloas	
Age	41-50	Gender	Male	State	VIC
Occupation (if available)	Construction worker				
Text of submission	<p>I have worked in the construction industry for over 33 years now and have seen how the industry has gone from secure work to insecure work. I am a carpenter/joiner by trade and over the last 4 years have trained myself up with the help of the CFMEU training division as a skilled labourer as well. Where I used to be employed on a full-time basis, now I'm working for labour hire companies on a casual basis.</p> <p>I find there are 3 different pay structures in construction; full-time, casual and sub-contract (ABN), I have been employed under each one of these over the years. Although the pay structures may be different, the employment is the same, apart from the laws they abide to, where once the job has been completed the employer can terminate your position at will.</p> <p>Advertised full-time employment is very rare these days therefore I have found more chance of gaining work through labour hire companies.</p> <p>Working for labour hire companies is like taking part in lotteries, you never know if you're going to land a days work, 2 weeks work, or 6 months work and the gaps between employment can be anything from 1 day to 2 weeks or more. So depending on whether the industry is in boom or bust, where casual labour hire could once have been a "fill in" position when work was scarce, it has become for me a main source of employment.</p> <p>There were days when you could walk onto a building site and ask for a job and your chances of getting a start were pretty good, but now you just get a funny look and told to try labour hire, usually the labour hire company which the builder uses.</p> <p>It is sink or swim for me, so I have had to adjust to be able to stay in my respected industry.</p> <p>I am enrolled with a few labour hire companies of choice that are signed to the CFMEU EBA. There are many that try to pay some other awards inferior to that award which adds another aspect of competition to the hiring environment, not only do workers have to compete for jobs with their skills but we are also in competition with our wages. Where one labour hire company will win a contract to supply workers to a particular company over another because they can charge less by paying an</p>				

inferior wage, or even sub-contract ABN.

I moved to Melbourne in 2004 as a single parent with my then 12 year old daughter. My first job here once I got established was 14 months work as a casual labourer on a major project in the CBD. This was the first ever casual position I have ever held in construction. Most weeks were 5-6 days, sometimes less. After 14 months of this I got used to it and sort of liked having the random days off. When that job finished I was advised by most people I spoke to, to sign up for labour hire as that's where the majority of work was.

Being a surfer I found the flexibility quite to my liking as I could go surfing during the week when I had no work.

But after 7 years of this I now find that I feel uncomfortable with the prospect of full-time work, I have become conditioned. I have thought long and hard about this, and see how my attitude toward work has changed, everything is short term. I was lucky to be hired out onto one site in the CBD for 6 months in 2009 with a major construction company. After being there for 3 months I was seriously considering quitting because I felt I'd been there too long. I had to battle with myself and take advice from my friends to stay on. The foreman I was working under even asked me if I wanted full-time work with the company, he could have arranged it for me but warned me that if I took it I would be "owned" by them. Where I was working a 36 hour week on this site, employed directly by his company they'd expect me to be available 7 days/week and be expected to work long days and sometimes after an 8 hour day, travel to other sites to do extra overtime where needed. Some jobs I don't mind working long hours if I know it's for a short term but not as a full time employee.

I declined because I have become conditioned to being casual and still today I'm not sure if I made the right decision or not.

Being in casual employment has the upside of 25% casual loading on wages, so we get a good wage packet each week and flexibility or free time, but the downside is the erratic employment, instability and external pressures. When the work is thin, sitting at home waiting for the phone to ring and ringing in to the various labour hire companies has its toll on my mental well being. A few days wait or more is ok when the finances are good and I can go down the beach for a few days, but when the work is scarce or the finances are low it can become a bit of a worry especially when the wait starts to run into weeks. I cannot afford to take days off work to attend to personal matters because of the uncertainty of not knowing how long I will be needed. If I take time off, the company may just let me go and replace me with another worker. Also, if I don't do the overtime required there's the chance I can get replaced also.

The external pressures are the worst to deal with. Family pressure is unbearable to the point I sometimes lie when asked if I am working. They worry about me when I am out of work and I continuously have to explain how the industry has become casualised and not to worry. My daughter whom lives with me, now 20, also a casual and knows no difference asks

me daily how my job prospects are going. Centrelink is the worst, the way the system is set up is not designed for workers in my position. I am constantly required to look for full-time work, even outside of construction. My argument there is that if I take on an inferior job which I am not happy with, as soon as the phone rings from labour hire I will drop everything and leave even on the uncertainty of whether the work will be ongoing or not, even at the risk of being in breach of Centrelink rules about leaving full-time work for casual work. Construction is the industry I am fully qualified to work in and have adjusted to accordingly by upgrading my skills and become casualised. I have to be registered with Centrelink because I don't know how long the gaps will be between work, especially at the beginning of each year as the industry is cyclical and work is scarce at that time.

Relationships are hard to keep with women, they don't understand the nature of my work. When I have to wait long periods in between work it causes tension and can't handle it and leave. I have had numerous relationships failed over the years because of this and now it's hard for me to be in a serious relationship because the conditioning of instability has become a part of me.

As for a house loan, forget it. The one and only time I went for a house loan 3 years ago no bank would touch me. After talking to a mortgage broker I was advised to look at other investments, unless I got a full-time job for at least a year, or got married with 2 incomes coming in otherwise the risk is too great.

I recently signed with another labour hire company who has their EBA under the Australian Workers Union (AWU). I waited about 5 weeks for a start, ringing in once a week until I got a start on a current civil road project. Employed as a casual, I worked four 11 hour days and an 8 hour Saturday. I hadn't worked for 3 months prior to this job and it was physically hard labour. At the start I was a bit rusty but by the fourth day I was feeling fine and liking the work with hopes it would last till Christmas at least, approximately 3 months. My employer from the labour hire company rang me on the fourth day to tell me I wasn't needed anymore on that project. Later she rang and asked me how I coped because the client wasn't happy with my performance. I explained that I was just starting to get into it and if they had the decency to ask me I would probably still be there understanding my leave from work for a long period. So I was dismissed without any care. Later that week, the same labour hire company sent me to another roadworks project down Geelong way, about an hour and a half drive from my residence. I took it as I could pack a bag and stay with my friend who lives not far from there. It would be 6 days per week. I worked the first day no problems, got on well with the guys there and looked forward to the continuous work. The next morning I was rung by the labour hire company at 6am to tell me I wasn't needed on site that day because it was raining. I asked if I would be compensated with such short notice and told afraid not, that's just how it is. I thought about it, effectively if the rain looks set in for days I'd be sitting around not knowing when or even if I'd be going back. The uncertainty, and being so far away from home was too much on this one so I rang up and made myself unavailable for the project. My employer wasn't happy at all with me and cut the conversation short. I got a text message shortly afterwards advising me to put my timesheet in, I have

not heard back from them and doubt if I will again. So through no fault of my own I get a bad name with them and am back out of work. Also, while I was contemplating whether to stay on the project that morning the main construction labour hire company I am most loyal to rang me with work. Being an hour and a half away from Melbourne I had to forego that one, it could have been ongoing work.

As I write this submission from home, I get a call from my main labour hire company to start a job tomorrow. I am very pleased and hope it will see me through to Christmas

Regards.

Ewen Kloas

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.