



Pay Justice Action

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Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia
Level 6, 365 Queen Street
Melbourne 3000

By email to:

Submission from Pay Justice Action

Pay Justice Action is a grassroots campaign, working to both expose and close the stubbornly persistent gender based pay gap. We unite unionists and community activists in pursuit of this. The starting point for our campaign is that we speak openly about what women workers need and explain *why* the gender pay gap continues. Our goal is to build a campaign for pay justice that cannot be ignored!

In just one year, 2009/2010, the gender pay gap increased from 17% to 18%! Simply being female accounts for 60% of the difference between the earnings of men and women. A woman graduate commencing full-time work will immediately earn \$2,000 less than a man in the same situation, and this gap will widen to \$7,800 five years into their working lives. The result? Over a lifetime, a woman in Australia can expect to earn one million dollars less than a man! The growing prevalence of insecure work is part of this story.

And it is a very long story. Equal pay was a key battle of the 20th century, with the first formal acceptance of this principle in the 1912 Mildura Fruit Pickers case. For decades, women and their supporters fought relentlessly: equal pay for equal work was “won” in 1969 and equal pay for work of equal value was “won” in 1972. So why does the pay gap stubbornly persist?

Wage disparity exists because the work that women do is *under-valued*. This stems from women’s role in the nuclear family, which remains the basic economic unit of capitalism. In rearing children and performing domestic duties in the home, women are producing the future labour power that makes the system tick. As Marx explained, the value of labour power — which is the basis of wages — is the cost of both producing and *reproducing* it. But because the work of reproducing labour is confined to the private sphere — the home — it is effectively free to employers.

Women’s *public* labour has also become strategically important. The number of Australian women in the workforce continues to increase. However 45% work part-time, due primarily to their unpaid domestic and caring responsibilities. This further widens the pay gap. Australia has one of the most gender-segmented workforces in the world. A massive 62.6% of all employed women work in female-dominated occupations and 65% of all employed men work in male-dominated occupations. This is a key structural reason why, despite pay technically being “equal,” it is not.

Put simply, the work that women do is defined as lesser value than men’s work. Insecure work is rampant in many female dominated fields of work such as education, retail, tourism, and hospitality, cleaning, call centres, nursing, interpreting and many more industries.

There is also a pernicious myth peddled by employers that women *want* to work in casual employment because it is supposedly flexible and helps women to manage work/life balance. This argument is rubbish

— insecure work gives women less power and control over their working lives because they cannot plan, have no access to leave entitlements and little ability to say ‘no’ when the employer needs them at short notice.

Pay Justice Action, therefore, welcomes the establishment of the Independent Inquiry Into Insecure Work. A coordinated and sustained campaign by the union movement to address these issues is long over due. We hope the findings of this enquiry will kick-start a much-needed fight back!

We also welcome the emphasis of the enquiry on encouraging workers to tell our stories about the impact of insecure work on our lives. Here are some of ours.

Alison: “I went to university, did a BA and Dip Ed and became a teacher. I loved teaching and found the work rewarding. However, during the early nineties I had to leave teaching because the work was too insecure. I worked in the TAFE system where nearly all the teachers in the female dominated fields were employed on fixed term contracts or, or even worse, on a casual sessional basis. I was an active member of the Australian Education Union and worked hard to convince others that casualisation of TAFE would eventually impact on the entire sector including the predominantly male tenured trade teachers. Instead of finding understanding and solidarity, the more privileged layer of the workforce, blamed the predominantly female casualised workforce for their fate and only fired up industrially around issues that directly affected them. Casualisation of the TAFE system is now even more widespread — while my predictions about the future were right, I wish they hadn’t been! I no longer work in the career that I trained for because of insecure work. I now work in administration.”

Jess: “I have an honours degree but the only work that I can get is insecure work in telephone call centres. I don’t mind in-bound calls too much, but I cannot stand it when I can only get work that involves outbound cold calling and sales. I worked on and off for the big players in the industry such as Teletech, who don’t even seem to think of us as people — they talk about ‘ramping up’ and ‘ramping down’ to describe hiring new workers and laying people off. The first out the door are those who are not meeting the arbitrary targets we are expected to achieve. I’m embarrassed to say this, but I have sat at my workstation holding on to go to the toilet until my rostered break because of concern about the impact taking an unscheduled break would have on my stats. Even when I am getting plenty of work, I am nervous to spend because I never know how long the work will last. My work colleagues in the industry are predominantly women and gay men.”

Nasrin: “I am an accredited interpreter. Our work is very insecure because the industry is organised on a contract basis. I spent a lot of money to sit for my accreditation test after I had my first baby — my family said it would be good to earn some money by doing telephone interpreting from home. But now my children are at school, I’ve found that there are no other options for me. Interpreting is my career and I am good at it — but it is so fragmented. I work for three different agencies and still can’t make a decent living. When I accept on-site jobs, I don’t even get paid travel time. So I can spend an hour traveling to a one and a half hour paid job and then have to spend another hour traveling back. When I do meet other interpreters, it always strikes me that most of them also seem to be women.”

Frank: *“I am an engineer with a masters degree. For the first part of my career I worked full time in the rail industry specializing in construction. In 1999, privatisation meant fragmentation of project management and, although there was a lot of work around in rail and tram track renewal, I was made redundant in 2007. Since then, I have had a series of short-term contracts. The nominal pay is good, but I am often on call 24/7 and generally work 14 to 16 hour night shifts! On top of that, I have had three periods of no work, which does not make my pay look so good after all. Currently I am on a 9 month fixed contract and have to pay for my own superannuation. When I joined the industry men like me expected to retire in our fifties. Now I expect to work well into my sixties and my retirement income will not be nearly as good. In fact I’ll probably have to keep some part-time work just to survive.”*

Amelia: *“I used to do very insecure work in the hospitality industry in a hotel on the Gold Coast. I had to be available from 7 am to 11 pm but was only guaranteed 15 hours of work per week! I would end up working anything from 15 hours to 40 hours or even more per week and, as a result, I could not commit to anything. I couldn’t be involved in the community or make a firm social engagement. I called it the ‘life of maybes.’ A shift could be cancelled with no notice. My friends stopped inviting me to anything that required even a little bit of advanced planning. I couldn’t book a ticket to see a concert or go to play. One year, I had to rush around to sell my tickets to Big Day Out – which I’d really been looking forward to – because at the last minute I was offered a shift and my supervisor made it clear that I could not say no. My income was also insecure. I had no idea about what I would get paid from week so could not budget. As well as the insecurity, my average pay was very low.”*

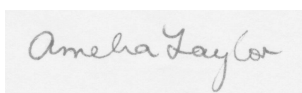
Jodie: *“I’ve worked for Medicare for some time now, but my initial work was very insecure. I used to work for a labour hire company that supplied staff to Medicare. Instead of getting the same pay as the ongoing public servants I worked with, I got less because the labour hire company took its share. I worked in a small special projects team alongside ongoing staff who did identical work to me but without the insecurity. I couldn’t plan because I had no idea about my future. But I knew we were doing a good job — I got heaps of positive feedback from my supervisor and our team won an award. I really wanted to get more secure employment. I wanted to start a family and needed a family friendly job where I could balance work and family responsibilities. In the end I got lucky — some permanent jobs were advertised and I got one. While I now have the secure employment I needed, I really feel for my workmates who don’t have what I do. Medicare still employs labour hire workers who are forced to live with this insecurity.”*

Insecure work – casual and contract – is one of the structural reasons that contributes to the yawning gender-based pay gap between women and men. Women have traditionally been over represented amongst the ranks of casual and contract workers. For decades, insecure work has been a feature of life for young workers and for women workers. However, as insecure work has continued to grow, adult male workers are now increasingly experiencing this highly exploitative mode of employment too. The recent study, highlighting that 40 per cent of workers across all fields are now paid casual rates or are on individual contracts, points to the extent of the problem. Pay Justice Action does not want to see a race to the bottom. We want to close the gender pay gap by ending the undervaluing of women’s labour, *not driving more men into low paid and insecure work.*

We believe that everyone needs a secure job with flexible arrangements to facilitate a work life balance. To close the gender based paper gap that insecure work contributes to will ultimately require an end the mandatory double domestic shift. What we need is free, 24-hour childcare, fully funded social services and for all carers to be paid a living wage!

If working people tell our stories, we are confident that this enquiry will expose the awful toll that insecure work is having on our communities. But we must do more than simply shine a spotlight on what is going on. We believe that rank and file workers and members of the community are ready to fight back — all it takes is the necessary leadership.

Yours sincerely



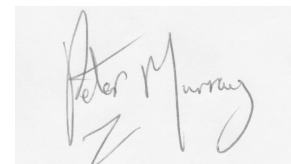
Amelia



Alison



Katerina



Peter

For the Pay Justice Action Team