

Why can't we build cars like we build houses?

Bob Day

A bricklayer walks into a homebuilder's office and asks, *"How much are you paying your bricklayers at the moment?"* The building manager may reply, *"\$900 per thousand."* (ie \$900 for every 1000 bricks the bricklayer lays). *"I'll do it for \$800,"* says the bricklayer. *"Great, when can you start?"* replies the building manager. Multiply that exchange a thousand times across a hundred different aspects of the housing industry and you get a glimpse of how the housing industry operates.

The beauty of this system is that everyone in the country understands and accepts it. It keeps the cost of housing down, keeps everyone on their toes and ensures a world-competitive industry. At the same time, people who work in the industry earn above average earnings and enjoy what they do.

It's also why people like to get three quotes before getting work done.

Now let's apply that same scenario to the car industry. Someone walks into the Holden car plant in Adelaide and asks, *"How much are you paying your people to put the seats in those cars?"* The plant manager responds, *"All up, about \$90,000 a year".* *"I'll do it for \$70,000,"* says the visitor. If the manager were to respond with, *"Great! When can you start?"* all hell would break loose!

Why is that? Why is it alright for bricklayers or carpenters or draftsmen or salespeople or site supervisors to decide what they are prepared to work for, but not a car worker?

As a result, the housing industry flourishes and the car industry disappears.

And it's not as if there weren't people ready, willing and able to work for \$70,000 a year. The Holden plant in Adelaide was located in a suburb called Elizabeth where house prices are low—you can still buy a three-bedroom house for under \$300,000 and employees can either walk or ride a bike to work.

Elizabeth also happens to be the area where youth unemployment is over 40%.

But Holden shut down its plant and all those on \$90,000 a year received their taxpayer subsidised payouts.

Perhaps someone could re-open the plant and take a leaf out of the housing industry's book.

I have absolutely no doubt the new start-up car plant would be inundated with applications from people wanting to work. And what would give anyone the right to deny those people who are presently unemployed the right to work under terms and conditions which they say are good for them and their families?