

The Stolen Wages Campaign

In June 2002 shortly after the Queensland Government's current Wages & Savings Reparations offer became public, a community meeting of nearly 200 in Brisbane including representatives from the north, passed resolutions denouncing the process and the offer. They agreed to fight for a better deal and sought support from social justice agencies and other community groups.



A coalition of Indigenous organisations was formed and began a campaign to renegotiate the offer which is now being coordinated by the Stolen Wages Working Group. The Working Group consists of elders, claimants, family and other Aboriginal community representatives for the former workers affected by this issue, trade union representation, ANTaR and other concerned community groups and individuals.



The Working Group has maintained that official and community recognition of financial injustices has been devalued because of the amount of the offer and its flawed process. The Working Group has therefore campaigned to let the wider public know the story of the Stolen Wages and to pressure the Queensland Government to reconsider its 'final offer' on the matter.

There has been wide support from trade unions for this campaign. In November 2002 after formalisation of the offer, the Queensland Council of Unions passed a resolution supporting community demands for re-negotiation. This resolution was subsequently supported by the Australian Council of Unions, Victorian Trades Hall Council and the United Trades & Labor Council of South Australia along with dozens of affiliated unions. A wide range of community and social justice groups have since joined that call.



A postcard campaign was launched by unions, community groups and Indigenous representatives in August 2003 to widen the fight for Stolen Wages through public education. 80,000 postcards have been printed and by March 2004 more than 50,000 have been distributed. The information on the postcards embodies the three primary goals identified by the Stolen Wages Working Group and supported by claimants, their families and Aboriginal communities across the state.



Pictured from the top are: Alf Lacey (ACC), Grace Grace (QCU) & Jenny Tannoch-Bland (ANTaR Qld) at the postcard launch in 2003; Peter Guivarra (ACC) & Leigh Hubbard (VTHC); Sharan Burrow (ACTU) with Lanora Jackson (SWWG) and her daughter Cassie; and, Jo Willmot (SWWG) with Martin O'Malley & Janet Giles (UTLC SA)

Three Primary Goals for the Stolen Wages Campaign

1.. The current offer should be considered a down payment.

- People accepting the offer will see it as being fairer if they have an option to pursue their claims further if they want to.
- Distribution of the current offer should continue but without the associated legal constraints. This will allow for an independent assessment to establish reasonable reparation (see below), and allow all claimants to access their own records.
- Any residue from the current \$55.6m offer should be re-divided amongst successful claimants. It should not be transferred into the Welfare Fund.

2.. The current offer should be extended to families of deceased workers (as per the NSW proposal).

Many claimants worked alongside deceased siblings and parents, and bitterly resent exclusion of their rightful entitlement. If a claimant is deceased monies owing must go to their family. It is not the Government's money to treat as it's own.

3.. Closure for the stolen wages issue must be re-negotiated directly with Aboriginal communities.

This is achievable within a relatively short time frame if the government wishes to demonstrate a genuine 'spirit of reconciliation'.

It is necessary because:

- The current offer does not respect or acknowledge the crucial role of former workers in the development of this State, particularly the pastoral industry.
- The current offer does not acknowledge that contemporary poverty is due in large part to long term financial deprivation through Stolen Wages.
- The current offer ignores the voices of those whose stories make up the untold history of this State.

Re-negotiation must be grounded in the building of community participation through localised evidence gathering and clear access to archival records.

It is the community's role to determine:

- who will represent them in the negotiation process
- the best process for informing people of their full choices including legal options
- the preferred process for speaking/ recording/ sharing experiences
- the preferred vehicle for independent assessment of real losses

For more information or to have your say about the campaign and its messages please contact the organisation or council who has distributed this paper in your area or the Stolen Wages Working Group can be contacted directly via:

Aboriginal Coordinating Council on (07) 4044 2999 or at www.accq.org.au

FAIRA Aboriginal Corporation on (07) 3391 4677

ANTaR Qld on (07) 3844 9800 or at www.antarqld.org.au

Queensland Council of Unions on (07) 3846 2468