

Stolen Wages Update2

AUGUST 2003



QCU rally launches national postcard campaign

A Queensland Council of Unions Stolen Wages Rally and launch of a joint national public awareness campaign has sent a clear message to the Beattie Government that the stolen wages issue is far from settled say members of the Queensland coalition of Indigenous organisations.

The rally, held in King George Square on Friday 8 August, included the official launch of a national postcard campaign.

Union and community groups including the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Queensland Council of Unions, Victoria Trades Hall Council (VTHC) and Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) have generated and endorsed the campaign with an undertaking to help with distribution of up to 50,000 of the postcards.

Speakers at the rally and launch were Qld coalition of Indigenous organisations member Alf Lacey; QCU General Secretary Grace Grace; Valda Graham (Liquor Hospitality & Miscellaneous Workers Union); VTHC representative Gwynnyth Evans; Beth Mohl (Qld Nurses Union); GMAG spokesperson Alex Davidson; ANTaR National Coordinator David Cooper; Pier Moro (AAWL);

Democrats Senator John Cherry; Dr Ros Kidd; Peter Eather (Miscellaneous Workers Union) and ATSI Commission Commissioner Robbie Williams. ANTaR Qld's Jenny Tannoch-Bland along with New Mapoon Councillor Billy Daniel (who was there with Umagico Councillor Albert Bond, both of whom came especially from the tip of Cape York for the event) also spoke at the official postcard launch which was introduced

with a song from Dawn Daylight. (See over page for 'What they said...') The set of three cards tells the story of the missing, unpaid and underpaid wages belonging to Aboriginal people who were forced to work over the past century.

One card supports the union's backing of the campaign, one is for Qld Premier Peter Beattie and the third, to be kept, has details of a fighting fund to be set up for a longer term campaign.

Stolen Wages Postcards are available from:

- Queensland Council of Unions (07 3846 2468)
- ANTaR Qld (07 3844 9800)
- Aboriginal Coordinating Council (07 4044 2999)
- FAIRA (07 3391 4677) and 4AAA(07) 3892 0100)
- ANTaR National in NSW (02 9555 6138)
- Australia Asia Worker Links in Victoria (03 9663 7277)
- Victorian Trades Hall Council (03 9662 3511)
- ACTU (03 9663 5266)



SUPPORT WAGE JUSTICE RETURN THE STOLEN WAGES

From the 1890s until the 1970s the wages and savings of Aboriginal workers were controlled by successive governments under compulsory labour contracts. In Queensland wages and other monies

belonging to these workers were kept in government-held "trust" accounts. Since the 1980s these workers have waited in good faith for their wage claims, which records show could amount to as much as \$500m, to be settled but in May 2002 the Government offered just \$55.6m as a 'take it or leave it' deal. Support these workers in their fight for what they are really owed in missing, unpaid and underpaid wages. Support their claim for all their stolen wages.





WHAT THEY SAID...

"I remember one lad from the work gang started rolling up his swag and I said where are you going and he said I'm waiting for the police to come and pick me up, I've got to go to Boggo Road. I said what for and he said I haven't paid my maintenance for my children. I said how can you pay your maintenance for your children, you don't get any wages? He said they still come and get me." Alex Davidson, GMAG



"If this government is fair dinkum then it will consult with all the elders from all the countries that make up this state, it will listen to their stories and it will pay real compensation." Peter Eather, Miscellaneous Workers Union



"Certainly it's about indigenous workers but whichever workers it happened to it would not be acceptable to us at the Victorian Trades Hall Council. We considered we had to support the indigenous people in this campaign and this campaign can't be allowed to be finished by Beattie with the pittance that is being paid." Gwynnyth Evans, Victorian Trades Hall Council

"I'd like to lend support to the Queensland Council of Unions and the groups that are trying to forward this agenda in raising awareness with everybody." Valda Graham, Liquor Hospitality & Miscellaneous Union

"On behalf of the Aboriginal Coordinating Council, I'd like to thank the ACTU, QCU, VTHC, AAWL, ANTaR, FAIRA and 4AAA for their contribution and support to the postcard campaign. We need the community to ensure a lot of these cards go off to the Premier's desk so he gets sick and tired of it because he has to take this responsibility in ensuring our old people are properly repaid." Alf Lacey, ACC



"On all of the levels, on an industrial level, social justice level and on a health level, the Queensland Nurses Union supports this campaign to see stolen wages properly paid to the indigenous community of Queensland. What the Queensland Government is currently offering is insufficient to address this past injustice - surely this offer is not the action of a smart state or a fair state. We can, we must do better than the offer that is presently on the table." Beth Mohl, Queensland Nurses Union

"On behalf of ANTaR I'd like to commend this postcard campaign to everybody, I think it is a really important initiative and I think it is something that all Australians can understand. Please fill them in and circulate them to your friends and colleagues." David Cooper, ANTaR National

"Unions affiliated to the QCU support the plight of those indigenous workers and we also support that this offer should never be seen as full reparations for what they went through. The postcards give a demonstration of some of those workers who were affected by the harsh and unjust law. There is action where you can send a message of support to the Queensland Council of Unions or you can send your message to the Premier Peter Beattie and the other ways on the back of the postcard in which everyone in the community can assist. We urge you to spread them amongst the community and send them in." Grace Grace, QCU



Future action...

The newly-formed Stolen Wages Working Group is meeting on a regular basis to discuss broader strategy and action while a group of sub-committees is working on initiatives such as speakers' kits and letter-writing, putting together a database of networks and supporters, establishing a register of claimants who have been deemed 'ineligible' by the Queensland Government to receive the current offer (on August 1 this year 27% of applications were 'ineligible') and monitoring legal actions. For more information see the contacts below.

WHO TO CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Keep up to date with developments and find out what you can do from the following people and organisations:
 The Queensland coalition of Indigenous organisations who are: FAIRA: (07) 3391 4677: <http://www.faira.org>
 ACC: (07) 4044 2999: <http://www.accq.org.au> Also the Grassroots Murri Action group and other supporters.
 For email information and contacts or to join a Stolen Wages Update list write to chowes@hotmail.net.au
 The Queensland Council of Unions: (07) 3846 2468: <http://www.qcu.asn.au>
 ANTaR Qld: (07) 3844 9800 <http://www.antar.dovenetq.net.au> Contact: antarqld@dovenetq.net.au
 Australia Asia Worker Links: <http://www.aawl.org.au> Contact: aawl@aawl.org.au
 Background Information: Dr Ros Kidd: <http://www.linksdisk.com/roskidd>