

Stolen Wages Update 3

JANUARY 2004

Qld candidates stand for stolen wages

Voters in Queensland will have the opportunity to send a clear message of dissatisfaction to the Beattie Government early next month with dozens of election candidates across the state publicly supporting the stolen wages issue.

The Greens, Socialist Alliance and other independent candidates have backed the Stolen Wages campaign by allocating preferences according to other candidates views on the issue or nominating because they are not satisfied with the Government's reparations offer and handling of the matter.

In Peter Beattie's seat, Brisbane Central, Adrian McAvoy is determined to meet the Premier head to head on this issue and a range of others he said he had become aware of after eight years of playing didgeridoo in the Queens Street Mall. Mr McAvoy said government had failed to listen to Aboriginal people, particularly over the stolen wages issue, and he has had enough.

"The treatment of Aboriginal people hasn't changed in 100 years," he said.

"The government has made this \$4000 offer just to try and shut our old people up but it's not acceptable and we're not going to go away.

"If we had \$40 million to fight this - and part of the point about this is we don't - they'd be running scared, there's no doubt about that.

"This offer has no dignity about it and I want to tell Mr Beattie that to his face and I want the people of his own electorate to know the truth of it so they can make up their own minds."

Independent candidate for the far north seat of Cook Bruce Gibson said an understanding of the stolen wages issue underpinned the Cape York region's previous and apparent inability to initiate economic development.

"The history surrounding the stolen wages is a history I know well from my immediate and extended family elders in Cape York as well as from my friends in the cattle industry," he said.

"How can anyone talk about the onset of welfare dependency and poverty and completely ignore the history of governments stealing Aboriginal wages for their own use?"

"Existing industry in the Cape, particularly the cattle

industry, was built through the labour of our elders and yet they have never been properly paid for their work, not through any fault of the current cattle industry in the area but because of the refusal of the government to adequately correct mistakes made in the past.

"The cattle industry shouldn't be left to explain the history of shonky government administration of Aboriginal wages and I'm hearing across the Cape communities a loud and clear message of dissatisfaction with the Beattie Government for failing to renegotiate the current reparations package directly with those workers."

Both Mr McAvoy and Mr Gibson attended a recent Stolen Wages Campaign Working Group meeting in Brisbane where discussion centred on three of the main messages of the campaign which were: to have the current reparations offer treated as a downpayment, to advocate for entitlements to go to the families of deceased workers and to bring Mr Beattie back to the table to renegotiate the current offer.

A third Indigenous and independent candidate, former-Palm Island chair Delena Foster, said she was concerned about the Government's failure to listen to Aboriginal people on this issue.

"The stolen wages is a human rights issue and through the current offer our people's basic entitlements are being taken away from them so I think what Peter Beattie and his government has done is robbed our people of their human rights. "They should be rightly compensated for the time they've worked."

Normanton elder Fred Edwards, who is featured on the stolen wages postcards, said given the chance he would ask Peter Beattie "why would I vote for you?"

"You haven't done anything for me and it's as simple as that," he said.

"The fact is that Peter Beattie has read the stories and I think he's going to come clean, he can't go on much longer.

"Aboriginal people all around and in the communities, they're all Labor voters and he wants to be careful.

"They might change this time, people are angry enough.

"From what I can see the government has got the message but they're just playing hard to get.

"In a sense I feel angry, they are still trying to pull the wool over peoples eyes.

"But that's what I like about this campaign, people are starting to wake up to them now and they're on side."



Bruce Gibson & Adrian McAvoy



Delena Foster



Nominated! Adrian McAvoy with family, friends and supporters at the Electoral Commission offices in Brisbane

South Australian unions support stolen wages campaign

United Trades & Labor Council of South Australia

Resolution: 19 November 2003

Council notes and endorses the Queensland Council of Unions position on this important issue and expresses our support for the Stolen Wages Campaign and for the demand for a just outcome for thousands of Aboriginal people who were robbed of their wages during much of last century. We call on the Queensland Government to withdraw its offer and put in place a fairer package. We urge affiliates to give support to the campaign.

Pictured right: South Australian UTLC President Martin O'Malley, former-Cherbourg resident Jo Willmot and UTLC Secretary Janet Giles with the Stolen Wages Postcards



In November 2003 former-Cherbourg resident Jo Willmot, now living and working in Adelaide, spoke to unions and community groups about the stolen wages campaign in Queensland. She received overwhelming support mixed with concern that the same thing may have happened in South Australia. Full copies of the speech extracts below, transcribed from a public meeting held on 28 November 2003 at the Otherway Centre, are available from the ANTaR Qld website at: <http://www.antarqld.org.au>

ANTaR SA Coordinator Glenn Giles

As far as ANTaR has been concerned this has been a really fundamental human rights issue...

The Queensland government took the wages so it's up to the Queensland government and other governments to fix up what injustice was done and continues to be done.

UTLC Secretary Janet Giles

For me [the stolen wages] raises a whole lot of workers' issues in relation to Aboriginal people and our responsibility as unions to deal with those issues.

The other thing is it really raises for me a concrete way in which we can engage and be helpful to Aboriginal people instead of being general and vague and nicely supportive by passing motions.

There's actually some concrete industrial and legal work we might be able to get involved in and that's how QCU has been really effective as well, in negotiating and having a look at the value of those payouts because we're good at that, it's what we do. ...

We're very good at passing motions but actually doing something arising out of the motions is much more difficult and we really want to make sure that we bring about some concrete changes.

So lots of work to do and I just really congratulate the stolen wages campaign which has been really useful to raise a whole lot of issues around em-

ployment, around entitlements and what's happened in the past, and how we redress those things as well as those issues going on right now so we're very pleased to be involved in this.

Jo Willmot

The many Aboriginal people who were taken away from their families and country and put into the reserves and missions became, in fact, a labour force for the broader community.

I grew up in Queensland in the 1960s and 1970s trying to understand the changes to legislation and law in 1967 which meant Aboriginal people had "opportunities" to be engaged in the broader community.

But I was also raised with the taunts and attitudes that we were lazy, dirty and had nothing to contribute, that we were very fortunate non-Aboriginal people came to this country and developed it for us, and that we were pagans or heathens. ...

There was so much happening after the 1967 referendum when Aboriginal people were acknowledged as people in this country and had the freedom to go in and out of the missions and reserves and live wherever they chose.

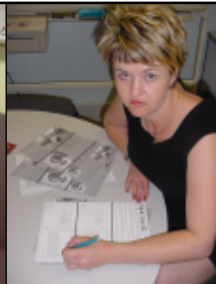
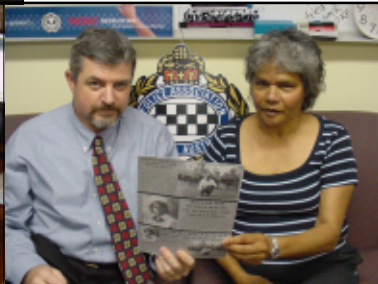
But because so much of their money had disappeared there was no opportunity for Aboriginal people ...

When the government first offered the \$2000 and \$4000 last year for their life's work, it was an insult. ...

They know it happened to them, they're not asking for hand-outs, they know they worked and they need [this] support to back them. ...

South Australian Union Secretaries and Organisers meeting with Jo Willmot in November 2003.

Pictured L-R: NTEU, NUW, AEU, CFMEU Forestry, PSA, FSU & CFMEU Construction



June 2003 - January 2004 TIME LINE ...

A continuation of the timeline published in the first Stolen Wages Update, June 2003. Stolen Wages Updates are available in PDF format from the ANTaR Qld website at: <http://www.antarqld.org.au>

...THE WAY IT HAPPENED...

July Stolen Wages postcard campaign is finalised for printing - initial print run of 30,000

August 7 The first Stolen Wages Working Group Strategy Meeting is held with representatives from Queensland and Victorian Unions and support groups.

August 8 Queensland Council of Unions host a rally and launch of the postcard campaign. 4AAA General Manager and Media Arts & Entertainment Alliance member Tiga Bayles was MC for speakers including Queensland coalition of Indigenous organisations member, ACC Deputy Chair & Palm Island Councillor Alf Lacey; Queensland Council of Unions General Secretary Grace Grace; Valda Graham (Liquor Hospitality & Miscellaneous Workers Union); Victoria Trades Hall Council representative Gwynnyth Evans; Beth Mohl (Qld Nurses Union); Grassroots Murri Action Group spokesperson Alec Davidson; ANTaR National Coordinator David Cooper; Pier Moro (Australia Asia Workers Link); Democrats Senator John Cherry; Dr Ros Kidd; Peter Eather (Miscellaneous Workers Union); and ATSIC Commissioner Robbie Williams. Some of the above reps spoke again for the official postcard launch which local singer Dawn Daylight introduced with a song and other speakers including ANTaR Qld's Jenny Tannoch-Bland and New Mapoon Councillor Billy Daniels.

August 18 Democrat Senator John Cherry puts a Senate motion noting the issue, endorsing the QCU position and calling on the government to negotiate a full and proper settlement of stolen wages. Despite support from both the Democrats and the Greens, the motion was defeated.

September 1-5 Claimant Henry Jackson's daughter Lanora delivers 10,000 postcards to Sydney and Melbourne for distribution.

September 30 Stolen Wages Postcard launch in Cairns by Aboriginal Coordinating Council. Peter Beattie admits postcard campaign 'politically damaging'.

October 8 National Indigenous Times reports NSW government is under pressure to negotiate with elders over wages and savings and child endowment monies withheld from Aboriginal workers.

October 14 Labor Women's Organisation Queensland 2003 Conference passes motion calling on Peter Beattie to reconsider the offer and change it to one that 'reflects the true value of the work performed, as a necessary demonstration of the Government's commitment to reconciliation'.

November 18-28 former Cherbourg resident Jo Willmot speaks to South Australian unions about the postcard campaign as well as addressing a public meeting hosted by ANTaR.

November 19 United Trades & Labor Council of South Australia passes a resolution supporting the "demand for a just outcome for thousands of Aboriginal people who were robbed of wages during much of last century" and urging its affiliates to support the campaign.

November Radical Women representative Debbie Brennan takes the Stolen Wages Postcards to the United States where it was well-received and supported by unionists and students.

December 8 50,000 postcards printed and delivered for immediate distribution.

December 12 Judy Spence announces plans to set up another 'trust' for the Aborigines Welfare Fund which will be managed by an appointed board of "eminent" Aboriginal Queenslanders.

December 29 Woodford Folk Festival hosts forum on the stolen wages. More than 5,000 postcards distributed throughout the Festival and the campaign is publicly endorsed by platinum-selling, ARIA-award winning band 'george'.

January 5 National Jewish anti-racist organisation, the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation Commission (ADC), calls for fair compensation to be paid to surviving workers and their families.

January 13 Peter Beattie calls a state election in Queensland. Three Indigenous candidates and others across the state declare the stolen wages as an issue of major concern to voters.

WHO HAS DONE WHAT...

The following unions, union councils and organisations have put material on their webpages and/or printed material in their journals and/or sent media releases and/or sent open letters: ACTU, QCU, VTHC, UTLC, HREOC, ACC, Reconciliation Queensland, Catholic Justice & Peace Commission, Uniting Care Centre for Social Justice, ANTaR, GMAG, ENIAR (European solidarity group for reconciliation), Australian Jewish Democratic Society and Anti-Defamation Commission, Communist Party of Australia (The Guardian), Australian Democrats, Greens, Socialist Alliance, Radical Women, Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, Inala District Coalition for Peace, LaborStart, ASU, QTU, QNU, LHMU, AAWL, QIEU, CFMEU, AEU and others.

The campaign has also been supported by all the major indigenous media outlets including Koori Mail and the National Indigenous Times, Gadigal Koori Radio in Sydney, 3CR and Koori Radio in Melbourne, 4AA, 4US (Rockhampton), 4K1G (Townsville), 4C1M (Cairns) and the National Indigenous News Service.

The Stolen Wages issue has been raised in various forums including the Federal Senate, Martin Kingham's rally in Melbourne (30 April), Medicare Rally (Melbourne, 5 September), Labour History Conference (Griffith Uni, 3 October), Jim Soorley's Sunday Mail column (12 October) and the International Human Rights Day Symposium (Griffith Uni, 10 December).

Campaign Round-Up

The campaign for Aboriginal people's missing, unpaid and underpaid wages and savings has continued strongly over the 2003-4 Christmas - New Year break with more than 20,000 of a new print run of 50,000 stolen wages postcards being distributed since they were delivered in early December.

ANTaR Qld and the Queensland Council of Unions have reported strong demand for the new cards as have other states including a request for 3,000 from unions and supporters in Victoria and strong support from South Australian unions.

Woodford Folk Festival

More than 5,000 cards were distributed at the Woodford Folk Festival during and after a forum, hosted by FAIRA's Les Malezer along with speakers including Aunty Ruth Hegarty and stolen wages claimant Henry Jackson's daughter Lanora. Organiser Walbira Watts said the forum was a success with people "crammed" into its tent venue despite short notice for the event. She said Reconciliation Queensland volunteers as well as performers across the Festival, including ARIA Award winners 'George', assisted with promoting the issue and the postcards to audiences sometimes numbering in the tens of thousands.

Anti-Defamation Commission

The new year also saw a boost to the campaign with the release of an 'Open Letter' from the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation Commission (ADC) President Dr Paul Gardner calling on Premier Peter Beattie to initiate a revenue-raising exercise in order to pay workers what they were owed.

The ADC, a national Jewish anti-racist organisation, made a comparison between the Ansett case, where the federal government had instituted a special tax in order to ensure adequate funds were available to pay retrenched workers their leave and superannuation requirements, and the "economic injustice" meted out to Aboriginal workers in the past.

Members of the ADC Board of Advisors, headed by former-Governor-General Sir Zelman Cowen, include William Deane, Malcolm Fraser, Bob Hawke, Lowitja O'Donoghue and Ninian Stephen.

Media coverage

Another significant boost to the claims of former workers across the country was coverage in three states via the NSW & Qld Sun Herald and Victoria's Sunday Age on 11 January.

The article, written by Sun Herald journalist Andrew West, covered the history of the wages and child endowment claims of thousands of workers in NSW, Victoria and Queensland as well as three short individual profiles of former workers Fred Edwards, Marjorie Woodrow and Des Donley.

NSW meeting

The articles timed perfectly with a preliminary meeting in Sydney on Monday 12 January between interested groups and individuals looking at the issue in NSW.

The meeting was attended by 20 people including Federation of Traditional Owners Council chair Les Ridegeway and other elders from a number of different

organisations and communities, ANTaR National Coordinator David Cooper, ANTaR NSW President Claire Colyer and union representatives including Labor Council of NSW Director of Organising Adam Kerslake and Trade Union Committee on Aboriginal Rights member Kevin Tory.

The meeting strongly acknowledged the need for a national report and agreed to meet again as soon as possible.



ACTU Exec member
Joel Wright & Lanora
Jackson, Sept 2003



Attendees to a meeting about stolen wages and savings in NSW

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, the ACC: (07) 4044 2999:
<http://www.accq.org.au>, 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>