

# Stolen Wages Update 6

APRIL 2005

## Survey launched to 'fill the gap'

Ordinary Queenslanders will have the opportunity to have their say about what they think of the Government's 'lousy little offer' for Aboriginal peoples' stolen wages over the next few weeks.

A survey developed by the Stolen Wages Campaign Working Group will be widely distributed throughout Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Queensland with teams of volunteers already prepared to 'take them to the streets' to get as wide a response as possible.

The survey was developed after budget submission made to Treasurer Terry Mackenroth in January this year was turned down, despite the State Labor Platform stating the Government should: "establish a formal consultation process to examine the adequacy of the original process and the current reparations package".

Townsville Working Group member Lillian Willis said if the government wasn't going to resource its own party policy then the Working Group would do what it could to fill in the gaps.

"If the government isn't going to fund this we'll prove there's people out there who do know about this issue and are concerned about it," she said.

Aboriginal Shire Councils have also indicated their support with President of the Aboriginal Local Government Association of Queensland Vince Mundraby saying the survey was a necessary "next step" in keeping up the fight.

"The dual purpose of this survey is to find out from the Aboriginal community what they really think of the current offer and for the non-Aboriginal community to have their say as well," he said.

Elder Yvonne Butler, a successful applicant who refuses to claim her \$4000, said the survey was an opportunity to identify how the Aboriginal community really felt about the offer.

"We believe the majority of applicants haven't come forward and this is a chance to try and find out why," she said.

Brisbane-based working group member Tiga Bayles said the general public as well as Aboriginal people could participate in the survey.

"This has been put together to cover the whole community," he said.

"It's important that the government realises this issue is far from settled as far as the Aboriginal community is concerned and there are other people out there - those who know about it - who believe the offer is unfair as well."

Questions in the survey include: "Do you think the Queensland Government's payment offer as it now stands is fair?" and "Should a formal inquiry, independent of the Government, be held to audit what is owed?"

A progress report on survey results will be announced in mid-May to coincide with the three-year 'anniversary' of the offer being made.



Yvonne Butler



Tiga Bayles

### LABOUR DAY ALERT - show your support!

**Labour Day this year will be acknowledged in Queensland between May 1 and May 3.** Despite a very busy and important time in industrial relations for the union movement at the moment, interest in supporting a stolen wages presence at May Day events has already been shown in regional towns including Townsville, Toowoomba, Cairns and the Gold Coast. In Brisbane the ANTaR Qld 'Stolen Wages' banner will be hard to miss, as will a table loaded with information and surveys at the speakers end of proceedings. Contact your own union or local Trades Hall and ask them if you can carry a banner or placard or two with them, provide a speaker or set up an information table on the day to show your support for the stolen wages campaign and unions generally.

### Speakers kits for national use available soon!

**Australians for Native Title & Reconciliation have formed a national sub-committee to support work on stolen wages in each state.**

The main focus of the committee falls into two areas: raising awareness about the issue generally and supporting a Stolen Wages National Report.

The speakers kit, suitable for use in every state and Territory, is almost ready to go and should be available on the soon. The kit is a set of 'five minute' briefing notes to present to groups or individuals who may have never considered 'stolen wages' to be an issue. The National Report is underway with

a questionnaire for potential claimants also in draft form. Dr Ros Kidd hopes to receive material from all states by June this year for the National Report. For more information keep an eye on the ANTaR National webpage at <http://www.antar.org.au> or contact your local ANTaR group.

# Extract: The Courier-Mail, 2 April 2005 'Stolen wages offer leaves a bitter taste'

The Queensland Government has not apologised for the actions of previous governments relating to the controls on the wages and savings of Aboriginal & Torres Islander Queenslanders.

The Government's Wages and Savings Reparations Scheme for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders indicates a written apology will only be offered to eligible claimants who accept the offer and that is still the case.

Those who believe they have a claim but are ineligible, some who are eligible who have thus far refused to

sign-off on the offer as it now stands, and the families of deceased workers who were affected by these practices have not received an apology.

Yvonne Butler, featured in the Courier-Mail last Monday, is one of those people who is eligible for the offer but has refused to accept it. While the Government's initial attempt to deal with the stolen wages issue directly should be applauded, it is widely believed this has not resulted in the issue moving forward for those who were affected, least of all in the spirit of reconciliation.

Thousands of people across the state

have indicated they are unhappy with the current \$2000 or \$4000 offer for individuals which closes at the end of this year.

The relevant section of the State Labor Party Platform, passed unanimously by the State Labor Conference last year, says in part that the Government should:

(a) provide for public recognition for the injustices endured by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders affected by successive government's control over their wages and savings;  
(b) support and make payment of financial reparations, and will view the existing offer as a first step to full reparation;

(c) establish a formal consultation process to examine the adequacy of the original process and the current reparations package.

It is disappointing that the Government and the Department of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Policy, under no less than three different Ministers over the three years since the offer was made, has said it will not consider any further changes to the scheme.

The total number of claims received under the offer is around 7500.

Given the Government's initial expectations of 16-20,000 claims to the offer, this does not seem to indicate it is "generally well accepted by the community".

The level and depth of feeling in Aboriginal communities across Queensland about their missing, unpaid and underpaid wages and savings, commonly known as 'stolen wages', runs deep - and it's time for the Government to do something more about it.

**Tiga Bayles**  
for the Stolen Wages Campaign Working Group

## Letter to the Courier-Mail from Dr Ros Kidd

**The experiences of Yvonne Butler and her family (Stolen wage compo deal 'an insult', CM 28/3) put human faces to a scheme that ran for 80 years and put millions of dollars of Aboriginal money into government pockets. Wages, child endowment, pensions, inheritances and workers compensation seized and exploited by the state. No-one given any written account of what was happening to their money.**

The government claims it is in the clear; that bank balances were paid out from the 1970s and everything was audited. Premier Peter Beattie insists that \$2000 or \$4000 is 'generous' compensation for years of financial loss.

Should we take their word for it? You be the judge. While Ms Butler's grandfather slaved for the pastoralists in the 1930s the Queensland government simply seized \$3.5 million, including fifty per cent of deceased estates, 'for departmental purposes'. From the 1920s to the late 1960s the state froze up to 80 per cent of private savings to generate investment profit.

In the 1950s, while children died of malnutrition, the state stockpiled half a million dollars of child endowment for Palm Island alone, and decided to spend it on trucks and buildings. Pensions were similarly raided in the 1960s: the department calculated an annual profit of over \$2 million.

From the 1920s to the late 1960s auditors continually warned the compulsory banking system was faulty: many withdrawals from accounts could not be authenticated, no-one could say if 'pocket money' had ever been accurately paid, many overdue wages were not recouped.

No wonder people were refused access to their accounts. No wonder poverty is endemic across generations.

There can be no closure without disclosure. This is a basic right. The government has collected this evidence for nearly ten years, and myself for longer. In the absence of an independent assessment the government's \$2000/\$4000 compo deal to shut down legal action smells very much like daylight robbery, yet again.

Dr Ros Kidd, Redcliffe, Qld.

## 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 Council of Unions: (07) 3846 2468: <http://www.qcu.asn.au>

ANTaR Qld: (07) 3844 9800 <http://www.antar.qld.org.au> Contact: [antarqld@dovenetq.net.au](mailto:antarqld@dovenetq.net.au)

Australia Asia Worker Links: <http://www.aawl.org.au> Contact: [aawl@aawl.org.au](mailto:aawl@aawl.org.au)

For email information and contacts for the Stolen Wages Working Group and its executive, contact Christine Howes on 0419 656 277 or to join the Stolen Wages Update list email [chowes@hotmail.net.au](mailto:chowes@hotmail.net.au)

Background Information: Dr Ros Kidd: <http://www.linksdisk.com/roskidd>