

Friday 11 May, 2018

Racist work-for-the-dole scheme survives another budget

The Abbott/Turnbull Government's racially discriminatory remote work-for-the-dole scheme, the Community Development Program, has survived another federal budget and will continue to generate profit from the exploitation of Indigenous labour.

Vaguely-worded changes in the budget suggest that the program will move to the same demerit system used by metropolitan work-for-the-dole schemes – but there is no explanation of how this will reduce the appalling rate of financial penalties which have been the hallmark of the CDP to date.

CDP participants are currently 25 times more likely to receive a financial penalty than other welfare recipients, and 55 times more likely to receive a severe penalty.

The promise of wage subsidies for 6000 jobs over four years is grossly inadequate and ignores the fact that the CDP has eliminated almost all genuine job opportunities in remote communities. The Minister is unable to explain why a company which is currently being supplied with labour for free through the CDP would instead pay any portion of a legal wage through the new wage subsidy system.

The CDP must be replaced with a program which creates jobs for people in remote communities, rather than destroys them

Quotes attributable to ACTU National Campaign Coordinator Kara Keys:

“The Minister says that these changes will be subject to consultation – there has already been a senate inquiry into this program which found that it should be abolished. The problems with the program are not in dispute.

“By standing by this program the Turnbull Government is declaring that they prefer to create a system of indentured labour which exploits and punishes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over job creation and community development.

“The fact that many workers in this program are working for organisations and for-profit businesses in roles that would be paid anywhere else in the country is an indication that Minister Scullion and the Turnbull government are once again turning their back on Indigenous workers in favour of businesses and their profits who are able to access a pool of free labour.

“The fact that 6000 new subsidised jobs in remote communities will come with full work entitlements should go without saying.

“We welcome the assurances of Minister Scullion's office that under these changes there will be 'significant protections to ensure penalties are only applied when they are warranted' and the implicit concession that many of the penalties handed out to date have not met this lowest of all possible standards.

“The Turnbull Government has monetised the exploitation of marginalised Indigenous communities because it thinks there will be no political consequences. We are determined that there will be severe consequences for this unconscionable conduct.

“Minister Scullion needs to scrap this discriminatory program and focus on the economic autonomy and the dignity of paid work in remote communities. Anything other than the abolition of this program is unacceptable.”

ENDS

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