

Australia Dossier by Robert Barwick

Welfare 'crackdown' is under way

The government and the Labor opposition are forcing people into low-paying, part-time jobs, and slashing the safety net.

One hundred years after the world's first Labor government briefly took power in the state of Queensland in 1899, the social justice revolution that Labor originally represented has died out within the modern Australian Labor Party. The ALP has joined the ruling Liberal/National Coalition in attacking "welfare dependency," and promoting "work for the dole" schemes as the solution to unemployment.

"Welfare dependency" is the new evil which politicians are blaming for Australia's high rate of long-term unemployment, and they are slashing everything from unemployment benefits to invalid pensions. However, the insanity and mean-spiritedness of their logic was exposed by figures released by the Productivity Commission in late July, which show that for the 21 years since 1978, three out of four new jobs created in the private sector in Australia have been "casual" jobs — part-time jobs with no benefits. These low-paying, dead-end jobs are the ones that the "dole bludgers" will be forced into, and used as a vast slave-labor pool to help undermine Australia's rapidly shrinking trade unions.

The Productivity Commission's figures are particularly astounding for men: From 1985 to 1997, Australia experienced a net growth of 36,500 permanent jobs for male employees, while 502,400 casual jobs were created for males. Overall, 62% of all jobs created during 1985-97 were casual jobs.

Despite this dearth of decent job prospects, Employment Services Minister Tony Abbott in June blasted unemployed people as "job snobs," because more than 250,000 of the

615,000 dole recipients had not registered with the now-privatized government employment agency, Job Network, which has been in complete chaos since it was privatized over a year ago. Abbott blamed the "culture of welfare dependency" for the nation's high rate of long-term unemployment, despite a supposedly booming economy, and vowed a crackdown. His declaration was echoed by his boss, Prime Minister John Howard, a stooge for the British Crown's Mont Pelerin Society agenda of free trade, privatization, deregulation, and union-busting.

Meanwhile, the allegedly "pro-worker" ALP is trying to outdo the National Coalition. On July 25, ALP employment spokesman Martin Ferguson declared that work-for-the-dole was "a fact of life," and that the ALP differed from the Coalition only on how much "training" the welfare recipients should receive. ALP backbencher and "Third Way" flagbearer Mark Latham told a conference of the Brisbane Institute on July 26 that welfare is "too much like charity," and called for a crackdown on invalid pension entitlements and for moves to force teenage mothers into the workforce, along the lines of the evil 1996 U.S. "welfare reform" bill. All of this will hit hardest Australia's most disadvantaged citizens, particularly those of Aboriginal descent.

Australia's policies toward its 250,000 or so Aboriginal citizens over the past three decades, under both Labor and the National Coalition, have been an utter disgrace. In the late 1960s, the government policy of "assimilation" of Aboriginal citizens was changed, under the direction of such

intimates of Prince Philip as Dr. H.C. "Nugget" Coombs, longtime central bank head and the "father of Aboriginal land rights," to a policy of "indigenism" and "land rights." Coombs set up the Community Employment Program, which paid Aborigines to return to an "indigenous" lifestyle in rural Australia, and which is the origin of much of the "dole problem" among Aborigines today. Now, three decades and untold billions of dollars spent for "land rights" later, the Aborigines are worse off than ever, with a life expectancy 20 years below that of whites; chronic alcoholism; severe health problems, including a shocking rate of sexually transmitted diseases; and high rates of family violence.

Of course, "land rights" was never meant to benefit Aborigines, but was a scheme to lock up huge tracts of Australia under nominal Aboriginal control, but in fact under the control of the Queen's mineral cartel, Rio Tinto, the chief private funder of "land rights" from the very beginning.

Rio Tinto's leading Aboriginal negotiation partner has been Noel Pearson, the former head of the Cape York Land Council, about whom Rio Tinto executive Greg Walker once exulted, "The problem with the Aboriginal community is they don't have another twenty Noel Pearsons." Now, it is Pearson who lauds ALP "Third Way" propagandist Latham, who is *leading the charge for "welfare reform" for Aborigines*.

In widely publicized speeches, Pearson has denounced Aboriginal "welfare dependency" as a "disastrous con" which has "undermined Aboriginal law" and caused all the problems which Aborigines face today. His solution is that of the Coalition and the ALP: Kick Aborigines off welfare, and cycle them into dead-end, low-paying "private sector" jobs, leaving them worse off than ever.