



WHAT IS WORK FOR THE DOLE?

Work for the Dole (WftD) is a key part of the Coalition government's 'welfare reforms' outlined in the last Federal budget. These 'reforms' punish the poorest, most vulnerable people in our society. WftD forces unemployed people to work for free for non-profit organisations (like charities). **You either work for free, or you are kicked off the dole, and forced to survive on no income at all.**

WftD is being EXPANDED. The government is currently trialling their new WftD program in eighteen regions around Australia. In Melbourne, these areas are 'Westgate' (Melbourne's outer western suburbs) and 'Mornington' (Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula). **On 1 July 2015 the program will be expanded to cover all job seekers.** From July 2015, welfare claimants under 30 will be forced to do 25 hours of unpaid work per week, while 30-50's will be made to do 15 hours.

Under the new system, everyone on a Centrelink payment who is considered 'job ready' (most people) will have to do WftD after being unemployed for 6 months, as will anyone under 30, even if they are classified as having 'significant barriers' to work. All other claimants will have to do WftD after 12 months. This means hundreds of thousands of unemployed people across Australia will

be forced to work for free or starve.

USELESS

WftD is a failure! Countless studies, including some commissioned by government departments, have shown that **participation in WftD actually makes it harder to get a job.** Being forced to complete busy work to keep a meagre Centrelink payment does nothing to build skills. It makes life even harder for those bringing up children or caring for sick or elderly relatives. It takes up time that would be better spent studying, training or looking for paid work. Unsurprisingly, there is also evidence that **employers actively discriminate** against people who put WftD on their resume.

The government claims that WftD and other punitive measures that punish the poor are intended to 'build skills' or 'motivate' the unemployed to obtain one of the plentiful jobs that apparently exist. They speak of 'dole bludgers' and 'job snobs', of 'lifters' and 'leaners'. Politicians and shock jocks **blame the unemployed for being unemployed**, but what do they know of the stress and hardship of trying to live well below the poverty line? Have they ever worked for minimum wage in a precarious job, often far away from where they live, with little job security and no long term prospects?

They are being deliberately dishonest. They know (or ought to know) that **there simply aren't enough jobs**. In September 2014 there were 156,000 job vacancies in Australia. At the same time there were at least 750,000 people out of work. If you include those who are under-employed (do not receive enough work to make ends meet), an estimated 920,000 people in 2014, there are **ten job seekers competing for each job vacancy in Australia**.

Why are unemployed people to blame for the politician's crisis? How can people be made to work for free because they can't find a job when there aren't even enough jobs to go around anyway?

UNFAIR

Work For The Dole is best described as a new minimum wage. It exploits job-seekers, who end up getting **far less money from their dole payment than if they were paid the minimum wage** for working 25 hours per week. For those on Newstart, the rate is approximately \$10 per hour. For those on Youth Allowance, it is even worse, between \$6-\$8 per hour.

How can this be fair? **The legal minimum wage is \$16.87 per hour**. Work is work! Everyone who works should be entitled to the minimum rate at the very least.

But it gets even worse. **WftD participants have no access to the ordinary rights and conditions that other workers have** like breaks, OH&S regulations or the right to negotiate working hours. WftD participants don't even have the protection of the Work-Cover scheme (compensation if you are injured on the job).

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

Work for the Dole only functions because 'host organisations' (wealthy charities like the Salvation Army and the Brotherhood of St Lawrence) agree to exploit unemployed people. Organisations like the Salvos are attracted to this scheme because it makes

them eligible for government subsidies of thousands of dollars per unemployed person. **They benefit as businesses from the unpaid labour of Centrelink claimants.**

The good news for us is that the government needs to find roles for hundreds of thousands of unemployed people in these organisations. By placing pressure on the non-profit organisations and local councils who stand to benefit from the free labour of unemployed workers, we can disrupt Work for the Dole and stop it in its tracks. We'll be asking non-profits to **boycott participation in Work for the Dole**, and asking organisations that use volunteer labour to **keep volunteering voluntary**.

Even if you're not receiving a Centrelink payment at the moment, this matters to you. If you have a job, WftD is designed to reduce your wages. If you are studying, you already know what it is like to try and survive on a payment well below the poverty line, and it is very likely that you will face this situation when you graduate.

The **Dole Action Group** is a collective of unemployed workers and their supporters. Our key goals (so far) are:

- To fight for liveable (above the poverty line) welfare payments for all
- To abolish dehumanising Centrelink participation requirements
- To stop welfare claimants being used as a source of unpaid forced labour.

If you have a tip off about a Work for the Dole provider, would like to join us or find out more, **you can contact us** in the following ways:

Email: doleaction@gmail.com

On the web: <http://doleaction.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/doleactiongroup>

Twitter: @doleaction