

Scarlett, Cheryl (REPS)

From: Diana Rickard
Sent: Tuesday, 19 August 2003 12:28 PM
To: Scarlett, Cheryl (REPS)

Dear Committee Members,

Rural unemployed - and especially those who are still an hour or so from a major city or centre - need

- reliable public transport or failing this
- petrol subsidies.

They need to be able to have a decent sleep at night to be able to travel long distances to work or look for work:

- no chemical spraying by neighbours throughout the night
- no neighbours' kids on trailbikes around and around their 20 acre blocks
- no neighbourly all-night parties
- no neighbourly all-night dogs barking for nothing or at nothing

All unemployed - but especially rural, older unemployed - need a universal basic minimum income that allows them some human dignity - so as not to be tempted to earn enough to pay essential service bills as well as to eat. If they have looked for suitable work and satisfied the work activity agreement to the best of their capabilities, after 12 months on the dole they need the same rights and concessions that pensioners have.

In other words rural people need to be treated as human beings with the same sort of human rights as city people. They need to have support instead of condemnation when they are trying something different and sustainable - instead of being treated liked pariahs.

Unemployed block owners need cheap government loans - even for existing rural-based businesses - that would keep them in small cottage industry rather than struggle to compete with big agribusiness.

What unemployed older people - along with all unemployed people in general - don't need is to be constantly branded for attempting to find work that is not what the privileged classes consider to be work. If it pays - or even gives people some dignity and self-respect - it should not be condemned. Whether people are caring for the land, older relatives or for the community in general, if they can produce a practical plan of how they use their time productively - while officially unemployed - this should be an acceptable employment activity under the SS Act.

A recent headline in the NT News said 'Dole Bludgers Caught Working'. If it wasn't so pathetic, it would be funny!

Rupert Murdoch boasts about how he evades taxes. Is he a burden on the taxpayer? There was also a tiger picture on the same front page of the local Murdoch rag. The local 'businessman' who brought it here gets massive 'research grants' to continue to build his 'private' zoo. Is he a bludger? Look at your own incomes? You *may* pay some taxes - but how many - the right amount - or do you claim more tax back than a lowly market worker-cum- dole bludger would make in a decade?

At the beginning of this year, I worked for three months. I was taxed approximately one and a half thousand dollars for this. I thought that since I'd gone into so much debt to get my car working to travel in to town each day and I'd done a lot of my paid work from home on my own computer and that I'd used my own car for work-related business, etc, etc, I'd probably get most of my tax back - to

pay for the water bore I'd had to have put down on my block so I could have water - but no.

Apparently dole bludgers are only entitled to a small proportion of their dole payment as non-taxable. **Anything** over \$6000 is taxable. Dole bludgers get approximately \$9000 a year. I got \$7500 for my 9 month's bludgeing on the taxpayer.

Fully-fledged pensioners get to be higher non-taxable burdens. They can earn \$15000 or more before being taxed. A fair and equitable system, isn't it? Of course, no-one (among you) dares to point out that dole bludgers are taxpayers too. Everything a dole-bludger gets is disposable income. The indirect taxes rural dole bludgers spend on petrol alone would probably even out to what the average politician finally pays out in taxes - after claiming all those extra expenses back - including printing costs. Looks like the rural unemployed's indirect tax investment into the economy is more likely stronger than the taxation actually kept in government revenue from high income folk, doesn't it? e.g I finish up **paying** to go to work. It costs me \$100 or more in petrol a week to work or to look for 'suitable' work.

I'm back to work this semester - one morning a week for 3 hours at academic pay rates for 11 weeks. Twice what a dole bludger earns a week. I'd like to become a permanent academic but the increasing casualisation of the academic workforce prevents this.

Meanwhile I **owe** money because I look for '**suitable work**'. Nothing else. I don't have concessions for car rego, there is no public transport alternative, our rural shire increases its rates annually, petrol keeps rising, car maintenance is exorbitant, basic house and contents insurance costs a fortune, basic house and contents maintenance is non-existent. But - I have a credit card... Don't frown and ask how - but accept that the only way poor rural landholders and other marginally employed people in rural areas can exist is by credit - or barter when we are allowed to grow some food (without taking too much time away from looking for 'suitable work'.

It's not as if we have an alternative - can't walk, ride a bike, catch a train or bus into town - or to our nearest food centres. It's too far. Women can't hitch a lift.

I live a frugal lifestyle. If I was left alone to find my own suitable work - or even to work my rural block as a small farmer - with the entitlements to rural subsidies that big farmers get - I'd cease to be a burden on other taxpayers.

But... I'm not alone. There are several people around me who were in good jobs before capital interests of corporate shareholders became more important than keeping older rural people in suitable jobs.

If we, the older dole-bludgers feel hopeless, frustrated and completely demoralised, how do the younger ones feel? Bloody angry, I'd say, wouldn't you?

Not a very humane or dignified position to be in - a dole-bludger in today's state of fear and loathing - but then again, do we have a choice? Are you prepared to give up some of your privileges - as politicians wanting to privatise more health and education services and deny rural people adequate health, welfare and education - and as shareholders or relatives of shareholders in capital-intensive companies?

Are you prepared to map out practical and healthy alternatives for **all** Australians in this globalised world of free trade in just about everything? Or are you once again trying to rationalise your castigation of **any** Australian who is vulnerable and isolated by your not-so-free trade-off agreements with big business.

And - no - I don't have the choice of moving back to town because - unlike the land investments most of you have - I am unable to sell my rural land. Land values may be up but only the big boys

and girls can afford to take up farming. So I'm stuck- until I can afford to just leave it all behind to go back to bush and rent in town.

Good luck with your findings,

Diana