

ISSUE #3
DEC 2017

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PROUD OF
PUNISHING
THE POOR

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WITH THE WELFARE
REFORM BILL

Fightback!

Voice of the Australian Unemployed Workers' Union



DSP REJECTION: INFLECTING PAIN ON MOST VULNERABLE

Cover article by Jeremy Poxon

THE GOVERNMENT HAS committed to slashing the number of successful claimants for the Disability Support Pension (DSP), as part of strict “welfare-to-work” reforms that are inflicting undue stress on thousands of disadvantaged Australians.

In the last year, the AUWU has seen an enormous increase in the number of disabled people being rejected from the DSP and forced into Newstart’s punitive system of “mutual obligations.”

One of these people is Quang

Huynh, a 30 year old man from Dandenong, who - because of consistent rejections from the DSP - relies solely on Newstart payments and family support to manage his health.

Continued on page 2...

The Australian Unemployed Workers' Union is a national volunteer organisation dedicated to protecting the rights and dignity of unemployed workers and pensioners. Membership is free & open to all!

AUWU

Editorial

2017 saw the introduction of both the Cashless Debit-Card bill, and the Welfare Reform bill - innocuous sounding names for documents loaded with ominous measures: mandatory drug testing for the unemployed; increased penalising-powers for job agencies; increased mutual obligations; the completely unjustified expansion of cashless welfare; and increased waiting periods for the dole. It seems one of the most odious of these, namely mandatory drug testing, has been scrapped - due in part, no doubt, to fierce organised opposition from people like you.

Unfortunately, the fight isn't over - these bills and the plethora of ominous measures they contain (see page 7) will be passed early in the new year *unless we act now*. Parliament will re-open on the 5th of February - we have *only until then* to influence the decision our representatives will make. We encourage you to send letters to the notables below, urging them to reject these bills (registered "person-to-person" letters would be best, if you can afford it). We suggest writing to:

- Jenny Macklin (Shadow Minister for Social Services);
- Brendan O'Connor (Shadow Minister for Employment);
- the Nick Xenophon team;
- Darren Hinch;
- Ed Husic;
- and your local MP.

These people must be made to understand the cruel and pernicious nature of these bills, and how their fate in parliament will determine the way we will vote on election day. **Look out for a letter template in your inbox**, and upcoming posts on [facebook.com/unemployedworkersunion](https://www.facebook.com/unemployedworkersunion)

If you have something to contribute to this newsletter, we would love to hear from you. See contact details below.

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Donate!

As a volunteer organisation with no funding, the AUWU relies on your donations to survive.

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Fightback! is a quarterly newsletter published by the Melbourne Branch of the Australian Unemployed Workers' Union (AUWU).

The AUWU has been in operation since 2014 and is dedicated to fighting for the rights and dignity of unemployed and pensioners. We are a volunteer group with no funding or affiliations.

We have over 40 branches across Australia - to find your local one please contact us or visit our website. Membership is free and open to everyone!

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DSP rejections inflicting more pain on Australia's most vulnerable

Continued from front page:

Huynh is a type two diabetic with serious heart, liver and kidney conditions. He also experiences difficulty walking due to visual impairment from diabetic retinopathy that's left him virtually blind in the left eye. Routinely in and out of hospital, he also attends a heart failure clinic on a three-monthly basis, as well as regular renal and diabetic outpatient clinics.

In spite of all this, Huynh informed the AUWU that his application for a DSP was rejected this September, because his health problems didn't score enough "points" on Centrelink's increasingly stringent "impairment tables."

In order to reduce the number of people on the DSP, the Government is deliberately making it difficult for people like Huynh to make successful claims. Statistics from the Department of Social Services indicated last year that only 15% (approximately a sixth) of all applicants were granted the pension.

Compared to previous years, this high ratio of failure is staggering: in 2014-15 it was reported that more than a third of applicants were successfully making claims. This effectively means that, since 2014, there's been more than a 50% drop in successful claimants.

Unsurprisingly, more and more people are calling the AUWU's Advocacy Hotline with concerns and complaints relating to the pension. "It's incredibly concerning that disadvantaged welfare recipients - the people most in need of unconditional support - are being subjected to these cruel restrictions," AUWU Vice-president Ewen Kloas said.

The AUWU has a dedicated DSP

officer tasked with looking after the growing number of people who are being unceremoniously kicked off the benefit.

Huynh told the AUWU that his rejected claims have left him baffled, frustrated and incredibly stressed. "In my application I included a letter from my heart doctor as evidence," he said. This letter, written by Huynh's cardiologist at Monash-Health Dandenong, stated that "...his severe dilated cardiomyopathy is a life-threatening problem," and even concluded that "at present, he is not physically capable of participating in paid employment."

Huynh said his doctor was "mortified" that his application was rejected. She didn't know how she could further "prove" the worthiness of his ailments to Centrelink.

Disabled people on welfare are finding themselves under increasingly intense pressures to justify their receipt of payment. It's truly shameful that people with as many difficulties as Huynh are left to navigate their own way through a complex system that seems to be setting them up for failure.

For the last two years, Huynh has subsisted on Newstart, using medical certificates from his eye specialist to exempt himself from attending job agency meetings, training courses, and complying with other mutual obligations he cannot physically meet.

The AUWU is finding that many people are now relying on these temporary medical exemptions, in order to buy themselves some time to appeal Centrelink's decision against them.

Due in no small part to the sheer number of applicants now being

disqualified from the DSP, it's estimated that *a quarter* of the people currently on Newstart experience some type of disability. This effectively means tens of thousands of vulnerably ill Australians must participate in mandated job searches and other activities to receive the significantly lower dole payment.

Sadly, Huynh is but one victim of Centrelink's increasingly intransigent set of criteria, ruling people "not disabled enough" for the pension, then forcing them onto Newstart's system of mutual obligations to survive.

The AUWU is calling on the government to loosen these strict, "cost-saving" welfare eligibility requirements that clearly cause duress to many vulnerable Australians. Alarming, the government has become accustomed to treating disadvantaged people like little more than a financial inconvenience. Clearly, people who have serious health issues should be entitled to obligation-free incomes, so they can focus on looking after themselves. But, sadly, Australia has become very comfortable with the idea of attacking welfare availability to disincentivise 'bludging' and 'unburden' the budget.

Rather than investing in policy that actually tackles the conditions that entrenches so many Australians in poverty, we're more preoccupied with delegitimising vulnerable people's claims for welfare. No matter how they try to justify or spin such 'cost-saving' approaches, the government is in effect choosing to punish people for being disabled.

—

Jeremy Poxon is a media officer for the AUWU

Note: this is an edited version of an article that originally appeared on Crikey.com

Christian Porter is proud of policies that demonise and punish the poor

By Jeremy Poxon

Social Services Minister Christian Porter has been lauding his government's increasingly punitive and evidence-deficient policies as "bold" and "innovative" strategies that will continue to deliver savings to the Federal budget.

In a recent speech at the National Press Club, Minister Porter said that, while some of the welfare reforms may be "controversial," he was proud that his government is "willing to take risks" when it comes to programs that significantly affect the lives of the vulnerable.

The minister heaped praise on the notorious Welfare Reform Bill, amid stiff opposition from advocacy groups and health experts, who say it would push already-vulnerable people further into poverty and homelessness. For these groups, government proposals to drug test welfare recipients and control their income feel a lot more "cruel" and "unusual" than "bold" and "innovative."

Ignoring the views of these organisations, Porter made specific pleas to Senate cross-benchers, asking them to consider the Coalition's success in reducing the welfare budget, when sizing up whether or not to support his punitive 'reforms'. Effectively, Porter told Senators to prioritise the health of the budget above the health of vulnerable Australians on welfare.

The Minister largely focused on what he describes as the Coalition's fiscal "successes," compared to Labor, in reducing expenditure on social security and welfare dependency. He says that spending grew over 9% a year for six years under Labor, compared with 2% under the Coalition.



Social Services Minister Christian Porter

While it is true that the rate of welfare spending has slowed significantly under the Coalition, Porter neglected to mention that spending grew under Labor, mostly because of a tiny spanner in the works called The Global Financial Crisis.

Between Rudd's election in November 2007 and the middle of 2009, the number of unemployed

His government does not have a viable plan for those locked out of the labour market and meaningful income through no fault of their own. Instead, it's committed to implementing arduous welfare obligations, in order to 'modify' behaviours and disincentivise 'bludging.'

For those 'lucky' unemployed workers who manage to clear the

“Effectively, Porter told Senators to prioritise the health of the budget above the health of vulnerable Australians on welfare.”

people jumped from 470, 000 to 660, 000. Accordingly, the Labor government increased spending to look after those extra claimants needing welfare support during this difficult time. It doesn't bear thinking about what would've happened to these people had someone like Porter been in charge of their payments.

Even though Australia already has one of the toughest compliance systems in the OECD, Minister Porter, whose background is in legal justice, continues to make impassioned pleas for even tougher welfare programs.

welfare hurdles, Newstart hardly delivers relief from the deprivations of poverty. Minister Porter again dismissed suggestions that he needed to raise the Newstart allowance, even though the payment has remained the same in real terms for the last 23 years. Under his watch, 55% of people on the payment now live below the poverty line.

In light of all this, it's staggering that Minister Porter continues to pronounce the government's welfare reforms such a resounding success. There are far too many disadvantaged Australians locked

Continued from previous page:

out of the labour market, and falling into extreme poverty, for these claims to be remotely convincing.

Sadly, the mainstream media continues to uncritically reproduce his government's bogus narrative that we must deplete our safety net for the sake of the budget.

Alarmingly, we've all become accustomed to treating vulnerable

people like little more than a financial burden.

No doubt, as the Welfare Reform Bill edges closer to the Senate, Minister Porter will continue spruiking punitive welfare policies that do more to alienate and penalise the vulnerable than provide them with assistance. It's up to us to publicly reject his claims, and stand

alongside organisations like ACOSS, who are calling on the Federal Government to stop these "bold," "innovative" attacks on the three million Australians who currently live in poverty.

Jeremy Poxon is a media officer for the AUWU

Note: this is an edited version of an article that originally appeared in New Matilda

IN THE NEWS

CHARGES RE. DEATH OF JOSH PARK-FING

The Royal Agricultural Society of Queensland, a Work for the Dole project co-ordinator and a recruitment company have been charged with alleged breaches causing the death of Toowoomba teenager Joshua Park-Fing.

The three parties face a combined maximum penalty of more than \$3.5 million in fines.

The return of the summonses will be on December 22, 2017 in the Toowoomba Magistrates Court.

DRUG TESTING SHELVED

After the Welfare Reform bill was blocked in the senate, Christian Porter has confirmed that he would remove the drug testing trials of welfare recipients from the bill.

OUTSOURCING TO SERCO

The human services minister, Alan Tudge, announced that a subsidiary of multinational Serco – Serco Citizen Services – would be contracted to help operate Centrelink's call centre.

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) quickly criticised the Serco decision as an "absolute disaster".

The union's national secretary, Nadine Flood, said it was an attack on public servants, a threat to the integrity of private information and a privatisation

that would downgrade the quality of a critical public service.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT ON THE RISE

Close to one in five unemployed young people have been out of work for at least a year despite trying just as hard as older jobseekers to find employment, a B of St. L report has found.

At September this year, 50,500 young people aged 15 to 24 had been unemployed for at least a year, more than three times the number before the Global Financial Crisis. Among all unemployed young people, 18.4 per cent are classified as long-term unemployed.

ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS ARE DRYING UP

A report by Anglicare Australia has found that in May 2017, of the 171,544 job vacancies advertised, less than 26,000 (15%) were entry-level jobs, down from 22% in 2006.

Tasmania has the worst jobseeker to entry level job ratio in the country, followed by SA and WA.

PaTH PROGRAM

1,300 young unemployed people have had their welfare benefits suspended, for failing to take part in the PaTH internship program.

"Young people are being exploited, being put into \$4 an hour internships, but the fact is there are simply not enough jobs," said Greens Senator Rachel Siewert .

A TYPICAL
JOB AGENT

LIFE ON THE DOLE PAROLE



JOB AGENT: "YOU'RE NOT TRYING HARD ENOUGH"
ME: "IF I CAN GET OUT OF BED BEFORE NOON IT'S A GOOD DAY. I'M TOO BUSY COMING UP WITH REASONS NOT TO BUY SOME NITROGEN FROM DR. PHILIP NITSCHKE TO WORRY ABOUT YOUR FREAKIN' REQUIREMENTS."

I LIKE EDGELL LENTILS THE BEST BECAUSE THEY DON'T TURN INTO MUSH WHEN YOU FRY THEM.



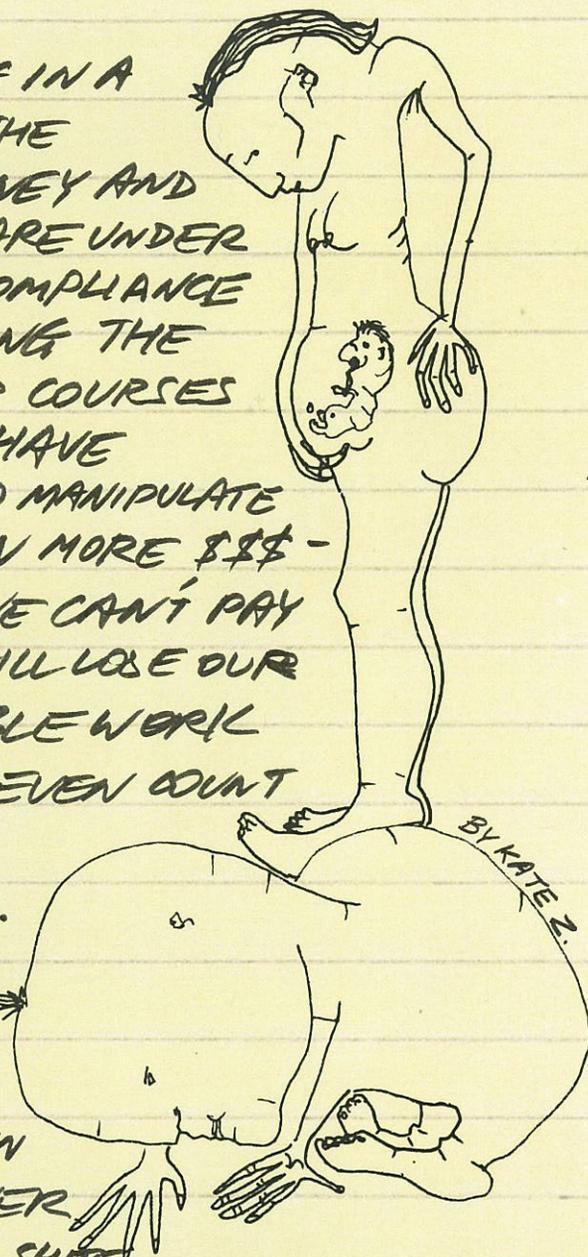
WOOLIES ESSENTIALS PASTA IS GOOD FOR A CHEAP MEAL. IT'S ALSO GREAT IF YOU WANT DIABETES OR IF YOU'RE AN ASPIRING BBW CAM-GURL AND YOU NEED TO BULK UP.

GODDAMIT WE'RE SICK OF LIVING IN A FUCKIN' SCHOOL YARD WHERE THE STUPID JERKS HAVE ALL THE MONEY AND POWER. SOCIAL PROTECTIONS ARE UNDER THE POVERTY LINE, WELFARE COMPLIANCE IS A CORRUPT MEANS OF FUNDING THE JOB AGENCIES AND THE BOGUS COURSES THEY SET UP... JOB AGENCIES HAVE THEIR OWN LOBBY GROUP WHO MANIPULATE THE GOV'T TO GIVE THEM EVEN MORE \$\$\$ - MEANWHILE WE ARE SO POOR WE CAN'T PAY RENT AND IT LOOKS LIKE WE WILL LOSE OUR HOME... WE CAN'T FIND STABLE WORK AND BEING A PARENT DOESN'T EVEN COUNT AS WORK EVEN THOUGH IT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT JOB THERE IS.

WE HAVE A FALSE ROBO DEBT, A PAY DAY LOAN DEBT, A RENTAL DEBT, AND AN ELECTRICITY BILL OVER \$700 EVEN THOUGH WE BARELY USE ANY POWER. GOV'T SPENDS MILLIONS ON USELESS SHIT LIKE FUNDING JOB AGENCIES TO PROVIDE USELESS SERVICES, AND SUPPORTING CASHLESS WELFARE CARDS INSTEAD OF SUPPORTING PEOPLE WHO CAN'T FIND ENOUGH WELL-PAYED WORK.

WE KNOW WHO THE REAL BLUDGERS ARE, SO FUCK YOU GOV'T, YOUR POLITICS STINK LIKE THE BIG ARSE YOU REALLY ARE!

"WORK FOR THE DOLE ISN'T TECHNICALLY WORK," SHE SAID SMUGLY, "THEREFORE YOU'RE NOT ENTITLED TO COMPENSATION IF YOU BREAK YOUR BACK."





1 malicious attack blocked!

[Details](#)

Description: mandatory drug testing
Status: shelved for now

9

THREATS REMAINING

-  A new 'demerit points' system: failure to meet mutual obligations (missing an appointment etc.) will result in the *automatic* loss of a point (ES providers will have no discretion). Four demerit points in six months means you'll fall into a three-strikes ("intensive compliance") phase. One strike: you'll lose one week's payment; two strikes: you'll lose two weeks' payment; three strikes: you'll lose four weeks' payment.
-  Parents will have to find a third party to back up claims their relationship is over in order to receive the single parent pension. Witnesses caught making a false declarations about a relationship could be jailed for up to a year. This is an outrageous attack on single parents pensioners (roughly 90% of whom are women) and will make it significantly harder for mothers to leave abusive relationships.
-  The maximum Liquid Assets Waiting Period will double from 13 to 26 weeks when a claimant's liquid assets are equal to or exceed \$18,000 for singles without dependants or \$36,000 for couples and singles with dependants - that is, people with savings above these levels may have to wait up to six months before receiving payment.
-  People aged 30 to 49 will have to spend another 20 hours more per fortnight looking for work or doing Work for the Dole. Those aged 55 to 59 can currently meet their mutual obligations by volunteering for 30 hours per fortnight, but the proposed measure will require them to spend 15 of those 30 hours on job search or another job-related activity, like Work for the Dole.
-  People affected by drug and or alcohol dependence alone will no longer be eligible for the Disability Support Pension. Conditions/circumstances arising from drug or alcohol dependence will no longer be considered an acceptable excuse for failing to meet mutual obligations (eg. being hospitalised due to a car crash sustained while under the influence may not be considered an acceptable excuse for missing an appointment).
-  Removal of protections for those who - due to extenuating circumstances (eg. hospitalisation, domestic violence, homelessness) - can't lodge a completed claim in time.
-  Payments will be calculated from the date of your first appointment with an ES provider, not from the date you express an intent to claim.
-  Those currently on the Bereavment Allowance or a Wife or Widow B pension will be worse off.
-  The DHS's power to gather information through coercive means and to use that information during investigations and criminal proceedings will be broadened.



A Petition

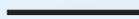
We the undersigned signatories are aggrieved of being deprived of our inalienable right to a basic livable income derived from the resources of the Commonwealth to which we are entitled to as human beings and citizens of this country.

The right to social security is a fundamental right, affirmed under the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to which Australia is a signatory.

The signatories to this petition ask the Senate to consider the following proposition below and then cast a majority vote in the affirmative for the question to be presented in a referendum to the Australian People in the following form.

DO YOU APPROVE the proposed law for the alteration of the Constitution entitled-

“An act to alter the Constitution, so that Australian citizens in the event of unemployment or retirement, have the inalienable right to a non taxable monetary allowance equivalent to the cost of living measured on a quarterly basis as set forth by the Melbourne Institute Applied Economic and Social Research, without Australian government interference on how the individual spends that allowance.”



Scan the QR code below to sign this petition on change.org:





STORIES FROM THE SILENCED

To fight the government's punitive approach, it is important that your voices be heard. The AUWU is currently collecting stories from unemployed people about their experiences with job agencies, with the aim of releasing a report next year exposing this broken and inhumane system.



"I've been on Centrelink for a few years now, but for the last 2 years I've been on consistent medical certificates for bad depression and anxiety. I've had a lot of trouble with Max Employment. Last week my medical cert ran out and I did not realise and therefore hadn't been to the doctors to get another one. missed one appointment with Max and I have been instantly cut off my payments right before Christmas. My doctor is usually pretty busy and takes me up to a week and a half to get in sometimes. Just thought I should say how wrong I think it is that a private company like Max Employment can cut someone's lifeline off just like that, and so close to Christmas. I also have 50/50 custody of my 6-year-old daughter. I was in a fairly good place before all of this and now it has sent me spiraling back down to rock bottom."

- Anonymous 28.11.17



"Lack of help; constantly changing case-managers; no support; not one job-referral; no training programs offered ... [They] basically put me in the "too hard" basket because I have mental health issues, but can't pass the LNP's 20 points [test] for DSP, because no one can. I want to work, but even Woolworth's won't employ me. Job agency says I need help with mental issues, but can't get help! LNP have made it very difficult for me.

[I'm] 56, Aboriginal, [have] mental health issues, and now 3 years out of work – [that] makes it hard to get work, but the LNP and the job agency don't care, and call me lazy. Minister Cash: I have worked 10 times harder than you ever could or have in your whole life."

- Anonymous 30.7.17



"I was bullied and intimidated by an employee of Max Employment for not accepting a job that ... which involved the removal of asbestos ... without proper training. The CFMEU also said that the pay rate for the job was too low and I should not have been expected to do the job in question because I am not qualified to remove asbestos. The fact that I have a medical condition that prevents me from working all night long was [also] ignored."

- Anonymous



"As someone who is a recovering alcoholic they forced me to do my RSA [certificate of Responsible Service of Alcohol] which I found shocking to say the least.

Every time i have been penalised I have been in hospital and have rung them before hand to inform them, yet they never listened

Even with a Centrelink medical, they would ring me and tell me a had to come in or my payments would get cut off. They marked me as missing an appointment when i was 5 minutes early yet was standing there waiting for someone to come to the counter. A lady told me a was never going to get a job because i had tattoos. They refused to transfer me to a Neato that was 5 minutes away and forced me to walk and catch 3 buses on a knee that requires surgery."

- Anonymous 2.9.17



To have your say, please visit:
unemployedworkersunion.com/tell-your-story/

FIGHTBACK REPORT

The AUWU has more than 6,500 members and 40 branches across the country. To keep members informed, each state branch coordinator has provided a brief summary of AUWU actions in their state. If you'd like support in building or starting a branch in your area (obtaining printing and a meeting room etc.) please contact your local state branch coordinator for support. If you would like to communicate with AUWU members in your area and organise actions, please join the AUWU's online activist network available through the volunteer page on the AUWU website.

VICTORIA

In Victoria the AUWU has 1519 members (previously 1176) and 9 branches. Melbourne, Ballarat and Bendigo are among the branches that have regular meetings. Victorian branches have recently undertaken a number of actions and events, including running the Advocacy course in Melbourne. The Victorian State Branch Coordinator is Richard Foley (0455 946 001)

vicbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com

QUEENSLAND

In Queensland the AUWU has 864 members and 12 branches. Brisbane branch holds regular meetings. The branch has been actively opposing the Indue Cashless card and a number of rallies have been held outside Indue's head office in Brisbane. The state branch coordinator for Queensland is Robert Leech (0404 172 428)

qldbbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In Western Australia, the AUWU has 292 Members and three branches which are consolidating. The Perth branch holds regular meetings. The State Branch Coordinator of WA is Eleanor (0455 946 001)

wabbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com

NSW and ACT

In NSW and ACT, the AUWU currently has 1076 members and 17 branches. The Sydney and Newcastle branches hold regular meetings.

Inner West Sydney branch will be focusing on building a national day of action against the cashless welfare card

in early 2018. It then plans to follow Anti-Poverty Network SA's example by pressuring local councils to come out in favour of raising Newstart.

The State Coordinator is Chris Parish (0415 073 898)
nswbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com

TASMANIA

In Tasmania, the AUWU has 166 members (previously 125) and three branches which are consolidating. The Tasmanian branch has been doing some extensive work meeting with local members and leafleting. The State Branch Coordinator for Tasmania is Russell.

tasbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

In South Australia, the AUWU has 623 members (previously 448) and two branches and are consolidating. The AUWU is working closely with the Anti-Poverty Network in Adelaide who are doing great work fighting for the rights and dignity of unemployed and pensioners. The new state branch coordinator for South Australia is Hayden Patterson (0408 361 360)

sabbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com

NORTHERN TERRITORY

In Northern Territory, the AUWU has 26 members (previously 18) and are in the process of building a branch in Darwin. Currently there is no state branch coordinator for the NT. If you are interested in this position, please write to:

nationalbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com

If you'd like support in building or starting a branch in your area (obtaining printing and a meeting room etc.) please contact your local state branch coordinator for support.

OUR DEMANDS

- **Raise all Centrelink benefits to the Henderson Poverty Line (\$517/week)**
- **Abolish Work for the Dole**
- **Abolish income management and other discriminatory practices**
- **Remove eligibility requirements (means testing) for social security**
- **Reinstate the CES and abolish the privatised employment services industry**
- **Undertake extensive government-run job programs**
(ie. Job Guarantee Program)
- **Secure employment for all workers**
- **Enforce the minimum wage and Award conditions in every workplace**
- **Reduce the working week to 35 hours**
- **Lower the retirement age to 60**

UPCOMING EVENTS

December 14th	Inner West Sydney Branch end-of-year gathering
December 19th	Frankston Branch meeting at Frankston Arts Centre, 3pm
January 17th	Frankston Branch meeting at Frankston Arts Centre, 1pm
January 19th	Melbourne Branch meeting at Trades Hall
February 3rd	National Day of Action (to oppose the 'Welfare Reform' and 'Cashless Debit Card' bills)
February 9th	Melbourne Branch meeting at Trades Hall
February 16th	AUWU Annual General Meeting at Trades Hall, 3pm
February 28th	Margaret River (WA) Branch meeting (location TBA), 5pm
March 9th	Melbourne Branch meeting at Trades Hall

✉ contact@unemployedworkersunion.com

📘 facebook.com/unemployedworkersunion

🌐 unemployedworkersunion.com

☎ (03) 8394 5266

The logo for the Australian Unemployed Workers Union (AUWU) features the letters 'AUWU' in a bold, red, sans-serif font. The letters are stylized with a white outline and are set against a red background that has a white diagonal stripe running from the bottom left to the top right.