



**Union of Unemployed,
Underemployed
and Discriminated
Workers of Australia**

Friday, May 13, 2005

The Honourable Prime Minister of Australia
Mr John Howard
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

Subject : Request for apology for attack on unemployed persons

Prime Minister –

On behalf of myself and of the great majority of my fellow unemployed and underemployed I ask for your apology, and that of your Cabinet, for your coalition's recent attacks on us as 'dole bludgers'.

The present economic situation in Australia is one of unprecedented structural unemployment brought about by technological innovation such as extensive computer use in businesses, and de-industrialisation as producers and retailers source manufacturing capacity offshore to boost their profits.

There are very many highly skilled, talented and well experienced persons unable to get work – any work - because so many jobs have disappeared. Many more can find only casual or part-time work, meaning that they have no dependable present or future income, can make no substantial plans, can buy no superannuation.

I can see that it's more convenient for you to pretend this structural situation does not exist, it's not your problem to fix, and to trot out the old 'dole bludger' bogey to justify not generating the radical remedies that are required. But it's dangerous kidding the smug-as-a-bug majority along by vilifying us, the victims of your misfeasance, making us out to be thieves and parasites. This gallery you play to can actually be convinced of our 'parasitical depredations'. I can see them already, stirred by your and your henchmen's incitements, descending on us one crystal night with their cliché'd clubs and torches, smashing windows, daubing 'Bludgers' instead of 'Juden'. Your sort of campaign has proved very effectively before. Anyone smell gas?

Help us, Prime Minister. I voted for you, and more than once – many of us did. Now we need your support. It is your job to resolve this problem.



14/2 Rosebank Street, GLEBE NSW 2037 Australia
Phone 0401 089 322 40bus@omnipotentia.com www.omnipotentia.com/40bus/



These structural changes came about faster than any previous comparable changes, and on a massive scale, due to their nature and environment. Their effects were less foreseeable, being without historic precedent. And these effects pervade all aspects of our life today, they are here to stay, they may indeed become more pronounced. They must be remedied to alleviate this hardship on a huge scale, and possible social disintegration.

Amongst the changes already obvious are large-scale structural unemployment and polarisation of income distribution. True unemployment in Australia is closer to 15% than the 5.1% official figure for end 2004. And underemployment – those who have only casual or part-time jobs, or work outside of their skills set - adversely affects possibly another 15% of the workforce.

We can not stop the technological change, nor would we – it is enhancing to individual productivity, it is essential to our continued economic viability and international competitiveness, and therefore desirable – it is a cause of the problem, but cannot be stopped or reversed, nor should it be.

And traders always seek immediate gains, without caring about long-term effects of job losses for local workers and thus of reduced spending capacity – although they are part of the traders' market. Sadly, I see no solution for profiteers' greed, irresponsibility and shortsightedness.

What has happened to the 'fair go for all' that was Australia? The true 'workers' nation'?

How sad it is that our graduates can't get work while persons without adequate language skills are employed - in customer service roles, even in broadcast media? That a recent survey of Sydney CBD workers showed that one quarter of them had to work more than 49 hours per week? How sick is it to see plasma TVs advertised to the mass market for up to \$7000, and domestic fridges for up to \$5000, when we 'dole drudges' end up after paying rent with about \$80 per week for food, clothing, transport and everything else?

How damaging is it that over 200,000 foreign students are encouraged to come here to economically prop up our degenerating education industry, incidentally becoming eligible to take over 200,000 casual jobs from locals? Not only do they drive down wage levels in the sort of jobs they compete for, they are almost all from societies with far lower workplace standards, and bring acceptance of these low standards into our workplace. Being students, with only short-term perspectives, they don't join labour unions, they accept below-award treatment. So the locals competing for the same jobs are obliged to match these lower expectations. This effectively opens up the workplace for reintroduction of those abuses and tyrannies which our antecedent Australian workers fought so long and hard to abolish over the past two centuries.



Is your Government to be remembered as the one that wiped out two centuries of gains in our labour laws and practices, and in the human rights of workers?

The recent tragedy of a young Asian man in Sydney, Carey Fang, apparently hounded to his suicide by his employer because he took a bread roll, illustrates this point most lucidly. Are the comfortable bourgeoisie in their North Shore enclaves no longer horrified and revolted at the old stories of people being jailed or transported for stealing a loaf of bread? Are the good old maxims of old – such as *You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the corn* – to be dismissed, simply in order for businesses to gouge out a few extra cents amongst their millions of dollars per year? Businesses engaged in such foul practices, and encouragements to engage in such practices, must be stopped. Our common Australian morality enshrines decent treatment for all, including our workers and unemployed – perhaps your Government should reinforce this desirable morality, should take a hand in stopping the erosion of our standards of living and lifestyle, of our human rights and decencies.

We fault your Government for not implementing effective measures to decrease the trauma of this structural change amongst its victims. The problem is long term, and long term unemployment is poverty – nothing less.

A Government response that simply blames and taunts and further disadvantages the unemployed - the victims - is odious, incompetent, arrogant, divisive, negative and uncharitable - definitely un-Christian, definitely contrary to all doctrines of human decency and basic kindness. And sense.

We ask that your Government acts promptly and positively to address this current problem of structural unemployment, and to alleviate the suffering it is causing to us, the community of unemployed and underemployed.

Measures could include putting to tender of government and public service needs on a smaller scale, and 'handicapping' tender award decision-making to encourage start-up enterprise groupings – hopefully of skilled unemployed - to respond; promotion of 'smart' local businesses such as intellectual content providers; reform of media regulations to allow small scale producers to use mainstream distribution channels; bringing Public Service employment conditions into line with those in the private world; making employment regulations more rational; making new business start-ups more accessible; policing employment and workplace discrimination more energetically.

More immediately we call for an increase in relief for the long-term unemployed – enough to enable a normal sustainable level of economic existence. Enough to enable a person to eat properly, to replace worn clothes, to keep warm in winter, to pay for utilities and other services acquired on long-term contract, to avoid having to lose their households and possessions, to maintain human dignity, to ease the stress on family relationships.



As I have no doubt you are aware, the true level of unemployment in Australia is closer to 15% than the 5.1% official figure – your coalition has always fiddled the true figures. Add to this the underemployed, that's a possible 30% of Australians of working - and voting – age, Prime Minister. I know that simple mathematics is not a problem for you, unlike bad memory – that is the problem, I hope, rather than lack of integrity? Remember making the point that you would represent the interests of all Australians?

I don't intend lying down to die, or giving in to the very real pressure to suicide that is magnified by your demeaning and hateful attacks, to accommodate your coalition's apparently pivotal employment doctrine as expressed by Ebenezer Scrooge – *They should die and reduce the surplus population.*

The poverty I am reduced to, like many of my peers, is very close to death – only you continue to feel the pain, and it goes on, and on. It is miserable and hopeless, cold and friendless, bitter and comfortless. But I promise you we won't die without a fight! I promise you that if you do not act appropriately, and promptly, on this huge national problem, whether through your laziness, miserliness, ineptitude, corruption, political jobbery, or simply because of the traditional contempt your coalition has always shown for the honest worker and the unemployed, you and your henchmen will live to regret it.

If you and your Government will not take the appropriate steps needed to re-enfranchise us, and to ease our immediate poverty, complex and costly as they may be, we will fight, and I will organize and use our numbers to bring back true democracy and egalitarianism to Australia, to make it the great workers' nation that it was once, and should be again.

Thank you for your attention.

**Hugh O'Connor, Spokesman
Fortibus**