

view. It met objections from major mining companies, which indicated they wanted workers with skills, not unskilled young economic conscripts from devastated working class suburbs. Gillard's plan is designed to overcome that flaw by providing the mining giants with greater control over the recruitment process. The response of the mining industry was immediate support, with Queensland Resources Council chief executive Michael Roche telling the *Australian Financial Review* that the measures were "worthwhile".

A Labor campaign spokesman also emphasised that the relocation plan was more coercive than an earlier trial conducted by the Howard government to move jobless workers to mining towns in Western Australia. "This initiative is backed up by stronger compliance. If a job seeker leaves a job without good cause, they will incur a harsher penalty than in the past," the Labor spokesman boasted.

In making the announcement, Gillard effectively accused the jobless of being lazy. She declared that the tougher measures were about driving home the message that "people who can work, should work". "We expect compliance," she said.

In reality, the ongoing recession in major sectors of the economy, including manufacturing, service and retail, has left hundreds of thousands, particularly young workers, facing mass unemployment and "under-employment". They have been forced into casual, temporary or part-time work, invariably on insecure and inferior conditions. Last week, the welfare umbrella organisation, the Australian Council of Social Service, released a report showing that teenage unemployment (15-19 year-olds) had hit 30 percent in 17 regions around Australia, peaking at 52 percent in north-western Melbourne and 49 percent in metropolitan Perth.

The official jobless statistics, which show a national figure of just over 5 percent, mask the toll in major working class areas, where decades of factory closures and de-industrialisation has been followed by a deep slump since 2008. According to the latest available Small Area Labour Markets data from the federal employment department, during the first quarter of this year, the jobless rate was several times higher in Brisbane suburbs like Woodridge and Kingston (both 21 percent), Inala (17.6), and Acacia Ridge (17.3), Sydney suburbs such as Parramatta South (13.6), Fairfield East (12.2) and Bankstown (11.9), Melbourne suburbs such as Broadmeadows (14.9), Dandenong (13.3) and Sunshine (11.3), and Perth suburbs like Kwinana (9.7).

On every front, Gillard Labor is striving to outdo the Liberals in rolling out right-wing policies to win the backing of the financial elite. Its "welfare reform" is intended to assist employers in mounting yet another assault on wage levels and basic workplace rights. As intended, yesterday's announcement won a tick of approval from the Murdoch media, with today's editorial in the *Australian* calling it a "Smart mix of carrot and stick". The newspaper commented: "The subsidies were a good idea when Tony Abbott flagged them in April and Julia Gillard, shrewdly, has turned the idea into good election policy... A bipartisan consensus on welfare-to-work serves the nation's economic and social interests."

At the core of Labor's program are the reactionary doctrines of

"blaming the victim", "individual responsibility" and "user pays" that have been employed in Australia and around the world over the past four decades to systematically wind back social rights and entitlements. Labor's "Modernising Welfare" document emphatically embraces the "mutual obligation" concept that was elevated to centre stage by the Howard government. It declares that this was first introduced by the Hawke Labor government in the 1980s "through attaching training or community work obligations to unemployment benefits".

In fact, Labor's track record goes back to the global recession of 1974, when the Whitlam government's treasurer Bill Hayden and labour minister Clyde Cameron coined the term "dole bludger" to insinuate that the jobless did not want to work. The Hawke and Keating governments went further, introducing a "Working Nation" scheme that pushed the jobless into low-paid "training" positions, funded by subsidies to employers. That, in turn, laid the basis for the Howard government's "work for the dole" program, which the current Labor government has retained. That scheme requires young people to work without pay, in exchange for meagre unemployment benefits, which today stand far below the poverty line, at a maximum of \$231 a week for single jobless people and \$103 a week for under-18s.

Like Gillard Labor, each of this government's predecessors claimed that their plans were driven by a desire to assist the jobless in grasping the "opportunities" provided by employment. The reality has been the opposite: an increasingly punitive regime to give unemployed workers no choice but to accept cheap labour jobs.

Against this bipartisan consensus, the Socialist Equality Party has intervened in the election campaign to advance a socialist program that defends the interests of the working class. The SEP's election statement advocates a massive public works program to provide decent employment for all, and build urgently needed social infrastructure, including public transport, hospitals and schools. It insists that a living wage, adequate to cover all needs, must be guaranteed to everyone as a basic right, including those unable to work. This program requires nothing less than the establishment of a workers' government to fundamentally reorganise the economy on the basis of social and human need, not private profit.

[Click here for full coverage of the SEP 2010 election campaign](#)

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