

# WORK FOR THE DOLE OR CONTRIBUTION EXCHANGE

Peter Adamis 6 June 2014



Peter Adamis 6 June 2014. Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country is a statement that has echoed throughout the ages and is still a favourite when rallying a nation. For whatever reason John F. Kennedy's politics, one has to admire him for being able to galvanize a nation that was divided.

Tony Abbot and his ministers are now faced with changing the mindset of the current generation and that of future generations in order that the lifestyle that we currently enjoy is sustained well into the future. We must as a nation collectively contribute to its economic prosperity at all levels and not rely upon the government to be tasked with the responsibility of managing Australia's resources, assets and the maintenance of its institutions.

We are no longer a divided nation of many tribes, but a nation that has many threads which bind this fabric of society we call Australia our home. We are no longer a haven for boat people and illegal migrations, we are no longer a nation to be taken for granted and we are certainly not without courage, resilience and tolerance. We have withstood the tests of change, the economic challenges have been met and overcome, our security and endurance tested time and time again and yet we rise above those challenges we have faced as a nation.

Today this country we call Australia requires changes to meet with and compete on a level playing field with nations to our north and that of our immediate region. To do this all Australians must bear the responsibility of these global challenges. This can only be achieved by being united, having the same mindset and cultural outlook that is conducive to nation building and cultural community cohesion

The budget for the 2014 has been a step in the right direction and despite some of its misgivings can be fine tuned to meet the challenges we face as a nation. The second step is to change the mindset of All Australians towards contributing to its long term economic prosperity and security. One method of changing a mindset is the manner in which we view ourselves and our approach to contributing to the workplace. Therefore it's in the best interests of this country that Tony Abbott and his ministers reconsider the Work for the Dole concept using a different name for example "Contributing Exchange" as one means of changing the mindset of Australian society.

**Positive aspects of work for the Dole.** Work for the Dole under the John Howard government was one of the most inspiring, encouraging, thought provoking and stimulation policies ever to be implemented. Privately, I and opposition leaders at the time voiced their admiration at the successful nature of the programme and acknowledged that it did bring communities together, mature age individuals attending workshops learning new skills, young people being re-motivated towards enhancing their life skills, long term unemployed placed in specific re-skilling programmes and a host of other work related re-skilling and re-education programmes designed to enhance an individual's capacity to find some form of employment.

Publicly the opposition downplayed and even attacked the concept of the Work for the Dole programme merely because it was an initiative of a Liberal Government. However despite all the negative rhetoric by the opposition what was not being made known was that many of those who found work could relate it directly to their participation and attendance on Work for the Dole programmes. I can remember managing Skill Link West, the largest Work for the Dole programme in Melbourne (second largest in Australia), providing innovative, employability and re-skilling programmes that raised an individual's awareness, life skills, social skills, thus enabling to be better prepared to obtain full time work.

Over the four year period of managing such programmes, I observed community interaction, discipline amongst the youth, co-operation amongst various community leaders, long term unemployed finding work, newly released members from government institutions being re-introduced into society, young

families being supported by associated welfare organisations that had tapped into the work for the Dole programmes, jobs being created, workshops providing new skills and most of all social interaction and new skills being attained. During this time a number of participants who tried to bypass the system soon found that non attendance also was tied in with their Centre-link allowance.

### **Negative aspects of work for the Dole.**

On reflection, I had found that there were only two negative aspect of the Work for the Dole programme was its name, nothing more and nothing less.

**First negative aspect.** The first was its name: Work for the Dole as it brought back some vivid memories of the depression years in the 1920s' where men were required to be employed on jobs far from home and in areas that were considered inhospitable and unwarranted. However, despite this negativity surrounding the name, the concept was vastly different from its predecessor as it did not lace any hardships on families but rather it created new relationships and strengthened the family structure as we know of it today.

I would often say to members who spoke against its concept "Change the name and change the negativity surrounding it". It was the same with main events regarding the inauguration of a major Work for the Dole programme where both sides of politics were invited and it is of interest to say that both sides during those inauguration programmes spoke highly of the effectiveness regarding community interaction and finding employment. Unfortunately these inauguration programmes did not often get the due publicity and recognition they deserved.

**Second negative aspect.** The second negative aspect was that industry, employment agencies, welfare agencies and captains of industry did not readily take to the concept at first but rather took the approach o what is in it for me. The first few years brought about mini welfare organisations, pseudo community organisations all working under the Work for the Dole programme with achieving any positive results and assisting individuals to find some meaningful full time or part time employment. This however changed when it was reviewed and organisations participating in the programme and had to complete Key Performance indicators, achieve goals and targets in order to sustain the work for the Dole grants in accordance with the programmes they were running and/or coordinating.

**A new beginning.** Today after some 15 years have passed, the Work for the Dole programme is back on the agenda and one hopes that the lessons of the

past would not be repeated and that name changes and captains of industry are better prepared to assist the unemployed. The current Liberal Government under Tony Abbot has a wonderful opportunity to create a whole new Australian psyche by the implementation of a Return to Work concept similar to the Work for the Dole Programme under a new name along with new and innovative ideas that will provide the skills and knowledge necessary in order to prepare the Australian work force to meet its obligations for the future.

**The 2014 Budget.** The budget that has recently caused some controversy is the best way to start as it will change the habits and psyche of a generation of Australians that the age of entitlement is over and that everyone will have to contribute to the economic prosperity, well being, stability and security of Australian and that of its assets and resources.

All Australians will have bear the burden of the previous (Labor) governments mismanagement of Australia's resources and created a government deficit which is now at a whopping 667 billion dollars. The current budget, draconian and harsh as it may seem, is possibly the best medicine that can be taken at this point in time if the budget deficit is to be nipped in the bud so to speak.

**Safety Net.** The safety net that is in place will not be affected as its the cornerstone of Australian society of giving a bloke a fair go and to stand up for the battlers, young and old. However despite the safety net in place, all Australians will be required to contribute in an economic battle that must be won if future generations are to support an quickly ageing population. Those that cannot work or are unable to work for variety of reasons, whether its long term unemployed, mature age, disabilities, mental health issues and other categories not mentioned here will be taken and should be taken into consideration and acknowledged.

**School leavers and youth.** Will require initial support to ensure that their social, occupational, health, safety, ethical and life skills are up to societal standards. That they have and meet with industry standards in the career they have chosen. That they are provided with on the job programmes and introduced into industries seeking workers to fulfill roles and responsibilities that will support productivity.

The new Return to Work concept will have a positive effect on families. It will create an environment where they will have a goal, a target and objective to aspire to with an outcome that will bring about positive employment results. It will release tensions, stress and create a harmonious atmosphere conducive to good family relationships

**Mature Age.** This is the most underestimated and forgotten fabric of Australian society. Mature threads that have contributed to the economic well being and stability to Australia and deserve a better deal from governments in power at the three tier level. Initiatives such as \$10,000 being provided to employers is but a drop in the ocean but a good start in the right direction. However more needs to be conducted to obtain the best results and increase the productivity amongst the mature age members of our society. There should be no pressure from any government, community or society placed on a mature age person to return to the work place if they have specialist needs or disabilities incompatible with the workplace. .

**Long term unemployed.** This is a difficult area to resolve which involves many societal aspects, such as mental health, disabilities, members released from government institutions, phobias, stress or health related issues and a host of other categories not defined here. Industries that require manpower should be subsidized if jobs and tasks are to be created for the long term unemployed and supported by agencies associated with the Return to Work programme. These will require specialist skills and management in order to create an environment where productivity and the individuals capacity to work is compatible and effective.

**Pensioners.** The term pensioners in the future will mean those who have reached pension age at 70 years old, but are still willing to keep working. This is not a matter to be laughed as it is commonly known that there are many members within our society that are fit willing and eager to retain some semblance of work and continue contributing to the economic well being of Australia. This particular group should be assisted should they decide to seek work after their skills set has been identified and suitable industries have been located. There should be no pressure from any government, community or society placed on a pensioner to return to the work place.

**Communities.** Collectively communities need support , advice assistance and mentoring other than what is currently being provided at the Council and State levels. Communities can mean cultural, new, organisations, workshops and any group that has members who are unemployed. The reason for Federal Government support is to create an environment where grants an funds can be made available if they can produce tangible and worthwhile programmes that are associated with and/or support Return to work concepts. The aim of this is to embed within the community that supporting Return to work programmes will enhance the community and its members towards a culture that is compatible with Australia's long term economic plans and longevity this creating a united society.

No matter what the industry, governments need to provide sufficient incentives to attract industries that will create jobs and employment opportunities for the long term and not for the moment. Plants, machinery, equipment, educational, soft skills, welfare, mining, agricultural, information technology, medical research and other like minded industries that can create appropriate workplace environments that are sustainable should be provided with financial support necessary to kick start such industries.

**Defence Personnel.** This is another area of society that fails to acknowledge the full potential of these men and women who leave the Australian Defence force for civilian employment. Their management, leadership, personal ethics, workplace ethos, morals, experience, training, discipline, life skills are grossly underestimated. They only support that they required is to provide them with job opportunities that are commensurate with their qualifications, skills and experience. Initially these same men and women will require support upon re-interaction and introduction into the civilian workplace environments.

The current Liberal government under Tony Abbott and his Ministers, must "bite the bullet" and "take the bull by the horns" so to speak to create an environment where the Australian psyche is changed towards a more sustainable and economic future. An future that no longer relies on welfare entitlements, a future where all Australians can rightly feel that they are contributing and doing their bit and laying the foundations upon which future generations can feel comfortable about supporting its ageing population. This will take time, great courage, fortitude and will power to achieve these goals if Australia is to become competitive in the new age of global work force.

In conclusion, Australians as a whole must once and for all understand and come to grips with that the day of having it easy and/or sustaining a lifestyle that is dependent upon mining and exploitation of Australia's natural resources cannot be sustained. Australians as a nation must enhance their social, life skills, qualifications, education and work ethos to meet the demands of the future. An Australia where all Australians can be proud to say that they have contributed and laid the foundations for a prosperous future. Before all that can happen, the culture and mindset must first be changed. The current 2014 federal budget is but the first step in making those changes.



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