

# Involve Aboriginal communities in housing developments!

by Nick G.

**Two state governments that failed to complete housing in remote indigenous communities by a federal deadline have had part of the federal money provided for the projects revoked.**

Queensland forfeited \$3 million and South Australia lost \$900,000.

Western Australia, which completed four additional houses above target received a bonus \$4 million in payments.

The SA government was given a year to build 44 houses at Amata and Mimili, two communities in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yakunytjatjara Lands in the far north of the state.

Government business managers were appointed in the two townships at the start of 2010, modelled on those who were placed into NT Aboriginal communities at the time of the racist "intervention".

Holding the state governments accountable for federal money, and requiring the completion of projects within a reasonable timeline is a good thing, but the same impetuous and bull-at-a-gate bureaucratic commandism that has caused problems in otherwise commendable initiatives such as the home insulation and Building the Education Revolution schemes was always going to be problematic in remote communities.

For a start, it pretty immediately prevented the training of Aboriginal people in basic skills that could have seen them benefit from working on



housing in their own communities.

Amata for example, has a TAFE institution, although what is taught there is very largely dependent on the skills and interests of a couple of white residents.

A holistic and less rushed implementation of the federal government's housing project could

have seen the TAFE office bring in outside staff for intensive short term training courses, with a required quota of community members involved in their own housing developments.

Instead, the houses on the Lands were constructed almost exclusively by young white tradies living in dongas on the outskirts of Amata and Mimili.

This had its own problems.

Unaccustomed to the permits that govern entry to the Lands, and which prohibit alcohol, some of the tradies smuggled in booze for their own secret consumption.

Some went further and are alleged to have brought in alcohol and drugs for sale to community youth. Charges have been laid against some of those concerned.

Both communities, up near the NT border, are a good two days' drive from Adelaide.

Construction was delayed after two tradies died in a road accident out of Coober Pedy as they returned for a break to the big smoke.

Sickness amongst tradies resulted in further delays.

An opportunity has gone missing in a government rush to claim results.

The business manager model ("These managers will coordinate the government's service delivery commitments and, as single point-of-contact, remove the need for local community members to navigate their own way through bewildering bureaucracies") can further marginalise town council members and elders.

These people should be well supported to deal with "bewildering bureaucracies" rather than be paternalistically "managed".

Real advances for indigenous peoples in remote communities will only occur when the traditional custodians are given genuine control over the nature and pace of development on their lands.

## Poverty and disempowerment

by Jack D.

**Poverty is often seen as an issue only relating to undeveloped countries. Yet poverty is a big and a growing issue right here in Australia.**

What is poverty? Is it simply a lack of money, perhaps something brought about by not having a job or by not, for whatever reason, being able to get a job? Would a fistful of dollars get rid of the problem?

No, far more important than lack of money or employment is a far more serious component of poverty – the lack of power. Disempowerment of any section of the people always leads to them getting far less of the social wealth produced in a society.

### A history of Indigenous poverty

In Australia's history the most blatant

example of planned disempowerment and then impoverishment of a group of people is the treatment of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These people have suffered the worst example of deliberate disempowerment, poverty and victimisation that can possibly be seen. They still suffer from such effects right to the present. Their poverty today, in some places, is exactly the same as is found in the worst of undeveloped countries.

### Poverty in Australia today

We find today that the process of disempowering certain groups is used much as it has historically been since the advent of Capitalism. The unemployed have been victimised, systematically demonised and put in a bad light simply to serve the interests of the boss class as

they try to force down wages and take away the focus from their own guilt for robbing people of their right to work.

In effect the boss is saying to the retrenched worker, "We are in a crisis of our capitalist system again, but I will not wear that crisis as a capitalist; you must wear it and you will lose your right to work and your income for as long as is necessary for my class to recover. Then, and only then will you be re-employed. But of course, you will be required to meet all your debts just the same; we will not freeze your debt till you get another job"

Historically, the 'Accords' of the Hawke and Keating years were designed to weaken workers main power, that of the ability to organise.

This was later built upon, as is always the case, by the incoming conservatives. Howard's fascist minded regime built very strongly upon the foundations of the Labor Party 'Accords' and attacked

and weakened workers' organisations and our ability to organise very much further.

Here we are only looking back about three decades to the 'Accords' but it shows the point very clearly.

There is an orchestrated, very well planned and cleverly executed attack on the working class as a class, to dis-empower workers. This is aimed at re-establishing the relative power and wealth status that existed between workers and the ruling class in the 1800's. It is being implemented globally, as the move toward world domination and exploitation by global capital grows more desperate, more intense.

In Australia the trends, especially since the introduction of the 'Accords', shows we workers must fight most vehemently for our rights and organise to win political power or we will soon become impoverished wretches as of old.