

Don't Budget Billions for Detention - Bust the Budget - Welcome Refugees

In the middle of a so-called "debt crisis", Abbott and Morrison's detention regime is the fastest growing area of government spending. Costs have gone from \$118.4 million in 2009–10 to \$3.3 billion in 2013–14. The skyrocketing cost is not from an increase in refugees, but from an increase in cruelty.



When questioned about their broken budget promises, the Coalition chorus in response is to try and shift the debate. They claim 'we are keeping faith with the Australian people...we are stopping the boats'. It is tragic that the ALP has nothing to say in response, agreeing with the Coalition on offshore processing. The fight for refugee rights must be part of the fight against Abbott's budget.

Abbott continues to try and use his chest beating 'stop the boats' mantra to bolster his plummeting support, but this is not a strong government, rather a weak, tricky and deceitful one. They are trying to hide brutality towards refugees, just as they tried to hide their real agenda before the election.

The head of commission of audit that proposed the budget cuts was Tony Shepherd, who until recently was chairman of Transfield. Transfield is the company now managing offshore processing and profiting from obscene government spending in this area. Tony Shepherd is happy for his old company to take government money, while proposing cuts for everyone else.

The costs of running the notorious Nauru and Manus Island detention camps, onshore detention centres, and the elaborate boat disruption and border control programs, already in the billions, are set to increase by more than \$1 billion 2014-15 and beyond.

Morrison's claim, that Australia will save \$2.5 billion over five years as a result of "stopping the boats" is another Liberal Party lie. The savings that would come from welcoming and processing refugees in the community, closing detention camps and shutting down boat disruption programs is many times more than what the government would save with \$7 Medicare co-payments.

Detention

The Liberals plan to spend \$8.3 billion on offshore and onshore detention over the next 5 years, which is up from the already outrageous \$7.5 billion allocated in last years' budget papers.

Abbott prioritised funding for the most inhumane forms of detention- Manus Island and Nauru. It costs \$400,000 a year to detain an asylum seeker in offshore detention, \$239,000 to hold them in detention in Australia, less than \$100,000 for an asylum seeker to live in community detention, and only around \$40,000 for an asylum seeker to live in the community on a bridging visa while their claim is processed. It would cost less still if they were given the right to work, whilst their claims were being processed.

Morrison claims there will be savings in closing 9 onshore detention centres. But this is deck chair shifting, as the plan is to simultaneously extend the leases for the Blaydin and Wickham Point detention centres in the Northern Territory as well as expand other centres. There are 1300 detainees on Manus and 1136 on Nauru. Abbott's budget will squander billions on brutalising these desperate people. He

is now proposing a deal with Cambodia, a third poor country, to paper over cracks in the deals with PNG and Nauru. It is expected that Cambodia will be bribed with tens of millions of dollars to take Australia's refugees.

Disruption

The cost of disrupting the boat journeys of desperate refugees and warehousing them in Indonesia could easily pay for a program to fly refugees from Indonesia to Australia and resettle them here, so that refugees would have alternatives to boats and people smugglers.

The \$957.9 million dedicated to "border enforcement" includes: \$10.1 million over two years for anti-people smuggling initiatives, \$60.3 million over two years until June 2015 to "Operation Resolute", the border protection operation. \$1 million has been allocated over 2013-14 and 2014-15 for the activities of the "Special Envoy for Operation Sovereign Borders". Two retired Bay Class vessels will be donated to Malaysia in 2015-16 to "assist regional efforts to combat people smuggling." Indonesia is set to receive \$86 million under Regional Cooperation Arrangements, which will go toward the building and maintenance of detention centres.

Deportation

Abbott allocated \$149.9 million over five years to fund reforms to compliance, removal and network management arrangements for the 30,000 asylum seekers who arrived after Labor introduced the "No Advantage" policy. This spells mass deportations, and stepping up the use of detention or offshore camps to coerce people to signing up for a "voluntary" return to their country of origin. The Government expects to achieve savings of \$2.1 million over four years by removing legal support at the review stage for asylum seekers.

Justice for Refugees

It speaks volumes about the Liberals' agenda, that they can come up with billions to punish refugees while savaging health, education and welfare. We don't need to work until we are 70 and we don't need offshore processing. The fights to free the refugees and keep visits to the doctor free go hand in hand.

The Refugee Action Collective meets every Monday 6.30pm at ANMF House 540 Elizabeth St (just north of Vic Markets). All welcome. Visit www.rac-vic.org, or call Lucy 0404 728 104 for more information.