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Productivity — lazy workers or lazy analysis?

Australia's productivity is never far from the news, with a recent survey ranking us second worst of 51 countries for productivity growth. But, as David Richardson explores, productivity means lots of things to different people and often the discussion is very confused, not least amongst business people.

On a recent visit to Australia the chief executive officer of Royal Dutch Shell, Peter Voser, expressed concern about productivity rates and the cost of labour, arguing for government intervention to make projects more economic.

"The overall competitive productivity rates [sic] in Australia are really a concern...You have the high Australian dollar, you have got the scarce workforce and therefore we are concerned about the overall rates which we're paying for Australian labour and that clearly needs some intervention from our side to make our projects more economic."

Like many other people, Mr Voser, whether deliberately or inadvertently, mixes up productivity, labour shortages, costs, competitiveness and profits; productivity itself is taken to be something to do with the viability of gas investments in Australia. There are hints at a cheap labour agenda. And we have no idea how to define his 'competitive productivity rates'.

Jennifer Westacott from the Business Council of Australia has referred to Australia as a 'declining-productivity nation'. She referred in particular to work the BCA commissioned on the cost of certain benchmarked projects in Australia and the US with the Australian ones being 30 per cent more costly. Benchmarking when you can pick your own examples makes

it easy to show almost anything you like. But costs are not productivity, and productivity has not declined, though it may well have slowed.

Ms Westacott, like I, could have gone to any one of the many data sources and found that in 2011 Australia's productivity, in terms of GDP per employee, (in \$US) was US\$130,000, compared with the US at US\$108,000. So Australia's productivity is 21 per cent higher on this fundamental measure. Put another way, Australia's productivity is higher than that of the country which has an industrial relations system our business groups aspire to.

Australia's productivity is 21 per cent higher than that of the US, which has an industrial relations system our business groups aspire to.

Instead of examining the actual productivity figures, reports such as that commissioned by the Australian Human Resources Institute find the measures they think are unfavourable to Australia. And their report on the Fair Work Act identifies all the measures that might prevent companies reducing their workers' pay. Those measures are then mixed in with the productivity debate.

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Gina's call a bit rich

Some mining magnates like to suggest they're the backbone of the economy, but having a go at low-paid workers is simply spineless, in Richard Denniss's view.

Two numbers pretty much sum up all that is wrong with political debate in Australia: Gina Rinehart earns the annual full-time minimum wage every 53 seconds and, at the peak of the mining boom, the industry contributed only about 0.5 per cent of Commonwealth Government revenue.

How could someone with as much inherited wealth as Gina Rinehart criticise the work ethic of those on the minimum wage?

Gina Rinehart earns the annual full-time minimum wage every 53 seconds.

And how can an industry that has contributed so little revenue to the Commonwealth, yet caused so much harm to the manufacturing, tourism and agriculture industries, claim to be the backbone of the economy?

Our public debate is simply broken.

Facts, it seems, have left the building.

When commodity prices fell during the global financial crisis, the first thing the mining industry did was sack thousands of their workers. Indeed, according to Treasury, if all industries had been as quick to punt their employees as the mining industry, the unemployment rate would have hit 19 per cent rather than its peak of 5.9 per cent.

While the miners are quick to claim credit for all the 'indirect jobs' their projects create, they refuse to take responsibility for all of the jobs that the mining boom — and its accomplice the rising exchange rate — have helped to destroy.

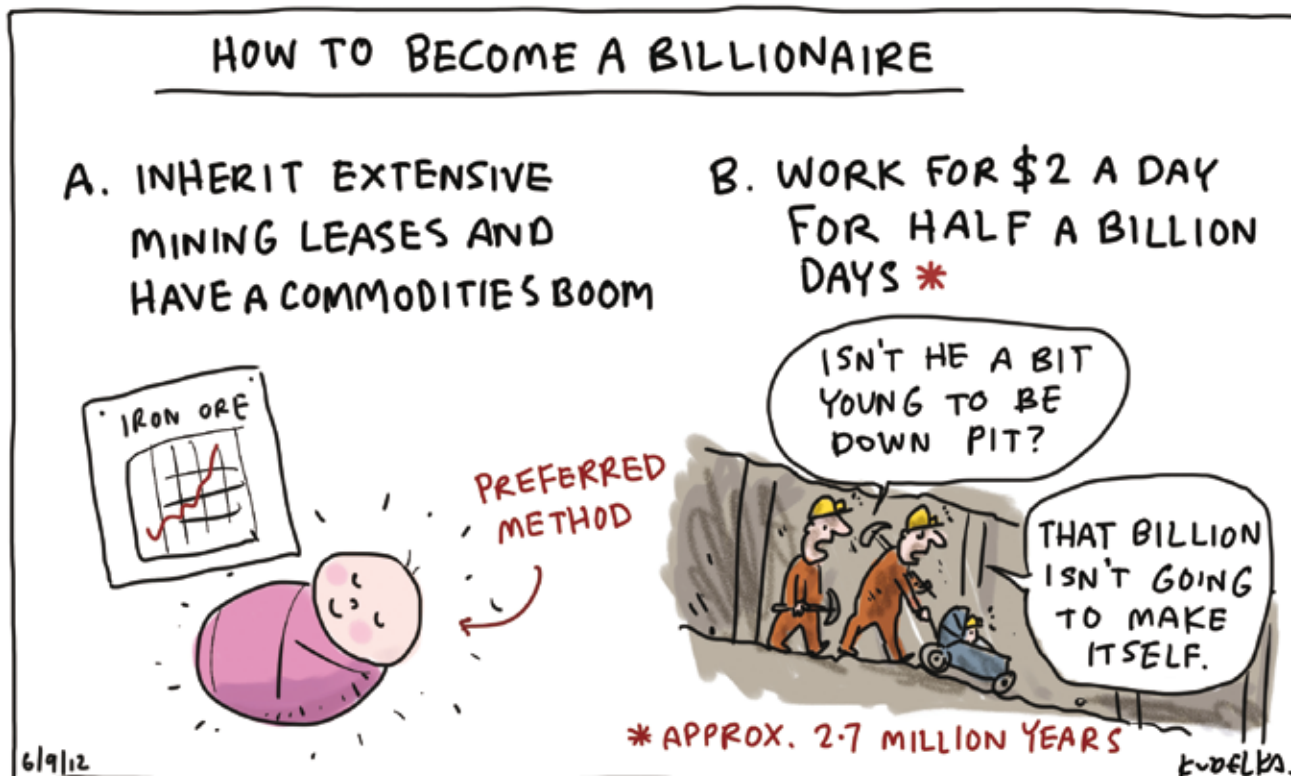
And then there is the \$4 billion a year in subsidies that we give the miners. While our politicians talk endlessly about the support given to the car industry, and what that may or may not say about our approach to protectionism, the fact is that the

mining industry receives far more taxpayer support than the car industry. And for what?

Our public debate is simply broken. Facts, it seems, have left the building.

The purpose of a subsidy is to encourage more of something, but you can't pick up a newspaper without reading a whinge from the mining industry about the shortage of skilled labour. So, if there is a shortage of miners and construction workers, why would we be subsidising its already rapid expansion?

In addition to the direct tax subsidies we give away, our State and Federal Governments are quick to pay for the 'infrastructure' that the miners need. Infrastructure usually refers to the kinds of networks, roads, rail, electricity and water that connect us.



Cartoon reproduced with kind permission from Jon Kudelka <http://www.kudelka.com.au>

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Exposing the great sunscreen cover-up

Nanotechnology has been touted as underpinning the ‘next industrial revolution’, but many questions remain about the health and environmental risks associated with this emerging science. Dr Gregory Crocetti from Friends of the Earth explains why Australians should pay particular attention to this issue.

In July this year, Friends of the Earth launched ACCC complaints accusing two Australian companies — Antaria Limited and Ross Cosmetics — of misleading and deceptive conduct for marketing nano sunscreen ingredients as ‘non-nano’ and ‘nanoparticle-free’. The complaint against Antaria is being supported by range of groups including The Australia Institute, the Public Health Association, the Australian Education Union and the Australian Council of Trade Unions. One company, Mukti, has taken the pro-active step of recalling its affected product in response to the revelations.

Millions of Australians rely on sunscreens to protect them from skin cancer, and want to know that available sunscreens are effective and safe. We take for granted that sunscreen companies not only know what’s in their products, but that sunscreen ingredients are properly assessed before commercial use.

The scandal creates a crisis in consumer confidence.

The revelation that thirteen leading sunscreen brands had no idea that some of their products contain nanomaterials is shocking. Affected products include Cancer Council ‘Classic’, Coles ‘Sports’, Woolworths ‘Clear Zinc’ and Invisible Zinc ‘Junior’ sunscreen.

If major brands have no idea that they are marketing nano-products, it defies credibility that risk identification and risk management in the sector is up to scratch. And when the nanotech sector is plagued by debate about the toxicity of its products, that’s a big cause for concern.

Nanotechnology, the ‘science of the small’, is touted for its economic

promise. Both the NSW and Federal Governments have invested generously in the sector, hoping that it will live up to the hype and underpin ‘the next industrial revolution’.

The novel properties of nanomaterials can pose a new range of health and environmental risks.

But there is growing evidence that the novel properties of nanomaterials, which make them attractive to industry, can pose a new range of poorly understood health and environmental risks.

In 2008-9, the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Nanotechnology recommended that nanoparticles be treated by regulators as new chemicals. This would require companies to undertake safety assessment before using nano-ingredients in products. The Inquiry also supported mandatory labelling of nano-ingredients in sunscreens, cosmetics, foods and workplaces.

Europe has been quick to act on the emerging evidence of health harm associated with nanomaterials. New laws will come into effect next year, requiring European sunscreen and cosmetics companies to conduct nano-specific risk assessments on nano-ingredients, and to label them.

New regulation and mandatory labelling are supported by public health and consumer groups, unions and many scientists. Unfortunately, despite the precaution, transparency and economic arguments in favour of regulation, here in the country with the highest global incidence of skin cancer, the Therapeutic Goods Administration is refusing to act, leaving nano-sunscreens effectively unregulated.



The absence of requirements for companies to test the safety of nano-ingredients before they put them in sunscreens is made worse by the lack of labelling. For members of the general public, choosing to avoid nano-sunscreens has been very difficult.

In recent years, Friends of the Earth has produced a ‘Safe Sunscreen Guide’, listing 140 brands according to their nano-content, on the basis of written questionnaires completed by sunscreen companies. Tens of thousands of the guides were distributed each year, in schools, in community centres, through unions and consumer groups.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration is refusing to act, leaving nano-sunscreens effectively unregulated.

This summer we were forced to recall our guide as testing by the National Measurement Institute revealed that several brands listed in our guide, as

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Measuring fugitive emissions

Most of the concerns raised in Australia about coal seam gas extraction have focused on the impact it has on the water supply. Yet, as Matt Grudnoff reveals, very little research has been done on the consequences of under-estimating fugitive emissions.

If I wanted to know what the fuel economy was on my delivery truck but I couldn't be bothered measuring it, I could choose to take the fuel economy number for my car and assume they are the same.

Many have come to see gas as a 'bridging fuel' in the fight against climate change.

But wait a minute, you might say. The fuel economy of a delivery truck and the fuel economy for a car are going to be completely different. You're right, but that's exactly the approach the coal seam gas (CSG) industry in Australia is taking with regard to estimating fugitive emissions.

With increasing awareness of the dangers of climate change, many have come to see gas as a 'bridging fuel' in the hunt for other forms of power generation that produce lower emissions of greenhouse gas.

Although a number of concerns have been raised about the environmental impacts of CSG, including the process of fracking, in Australia most of these concerns centre on water. These include contamination of ground water, disposal of produced water, reduced availability of water for other consumers and the creation of hazardous waste resulting from either treatment of produced water or drilling mud. There is also concern about the chemical cocktail that can be used in the fracking process.

Most of the difficulties in confronting these concerns come from the lack of information that is available on the broader effects of CSG extraction. Very little measurement and research has been done in this area.

Fugitive emissions occur when methane leaks during the extraction, processing and transportation of CSG. Leaking at

the wellhead during extraction is the most significant source of fugitive emissions and is also the source on which the least amount of measurement has been done. The current default measurement technique for fugitive emissions at the wellhead is the same as that used for conventional natural gas, despite the fact that there is evidence to suggest that fugitive emissions from the extraction of CSG are significantly higher.

While conventional natural gas, particularly offshore production, comes from large reservoirs and so has only a relatively small number of wellheads (which are very large and closely monitored), CSG is extracted from many small reservoirs. This means that for any given quantity of gas there are many small wellheads, rather than a few large ones. It also means that each of the wellheads is monitored less closely. For every tonne of natural gas produced from CSG, there is potential for more leakage to occur from the wellhead when compared with each tonne of gas produced from a conventional natural gas well.

Just as trucks and cars use different rates of fuel, conventional and unconventional gas will have different rates of fugitive emissions.

Another reason why fugitive emissions from CSG during extraction could be expected to be significantly higher than those from conventional gas is that the amount of emissions leaking from the wellhead increases when fracking is used. Unlike conventional gas, fracking is likely to be used on 25 to 40 per cent of Australian CSG wells.

The consequences of underestimating fugitive emissions from CSG are twofold: it blunts the efficacy of the recently introduced carbon price, as firms will not be paying the tax on all

of their emissions; it also prevents us from correctly calculating Australia's contribution to climate change. This underestimate may be inadvertently making it harder for the world to limit the warming effect of climate change below the environmental tipping point of two degrees.

There has been no justification from the Federal Government or the CSG industry as to why fugitive emissions factors created for the conventional gas industry should be applied to coal seam gas.

Very little measurement and research has been done in the area of coal seam gas fugitive emissions.

There have been a number of studies on fugitive emissions for unconventional gas in the United States. The US Environmental Protection Agency puts the leakage rate at 2.4 per cent of gas produced. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration suggests that fugitive emissions were 4 per cent and a study from Cornell University suggested that it may be as high as 7 per cent. In Australia the default rate is set at 0.12 per cent.

Just as trucks use fuel at different rates to cars, fugitive emissions from conventional gas are going to be different to fugitive emissions from CSG. The solution is to undertake better measurement of fugitive emissions, particularly at the CSG wellhead. Before we jump into the golden age of gas as a way of combating climate change, it is essential that we have a good understanding of the effect that switching from coal to gas will have on our greenhouse gas emissions.

A copy of Measuring fugitive emissions: Is coal seam gas a viable bridging fuel? can be downloaded from www.tai.org.au

Could you live on \$245 per week?

The pitifully low Newstart Allowance can act as a barrier to employment and lead to entrenched poverty, yet calls for it to be increased have failed to move the government. Ben Irvine outlines The Australia Institute's research on this issue.

The purpose of an unemployment benefit is to support an individual, and their family members, during a period of unemployment; however, the available support has decreased steadily relative to other benefits and living costs. The Newstart Allowance is \$245 per week for single adults without dependents, which is only around 40 per cent of the Australian minimum full time wage of \$589 per week.

As a percentage, the Australian rate of unemployment benefits is second lowest in the developed world.

For every 20 employed people in Australia there is one unemployed person. The changing nature of the labour market, particularly the rise of insecure work and the decline of unskilled jobs, is increasing hardship and uncertainty for some Australians in the labour market. Insecure work was discussed by David Richardson from The Australia Institute in *'Casual Labour: A stepping stone to something better or part of an underclass?'*. His report provided evidence that casual employment is often not a stepping stone to full-time work, but rather a permanent cycle of job uncertainty for many workers. These workers are forced to rely on the Newstart Allowance in between jobs.

Newstart Allowance is only around 40 per cent of the Australian minimum full-time wage.

Our policy brief *'Are unemployment benefits adequate in Australia?'* includes OECD data on rates of unemployment benefits as a percentage of the average wage, that place Australia second lowest in the



developed world. In addition to our benefits being among the lowest in the world, we found that they are well below what Australians believe they should be. An Australia Institute survey showed that Australians, on average, believe the amount required to meet the cost of living was \$454. This is higher than the Newstart Allowance by 87 per cent and approximately three quarters of the minimum wage. The survey respondents were also asked what would be their preferred level for the Newstart Allowance. The average response was \$329, a figure considerably lower than the perceived cost of living but still an increase of over a third on the current Newstart Allowance.

Our survey results also suggest that people would be forced to cut spending on essential items in a way that is likely to make it harder to get back into the workforce, and to exacerbate the risk of health and financial problems, not to mention putting people at risk of losing their home. A majority of survey respondents said that to live on the Newstart Allowance they would drive their car less (83 per cent), use less energy (77 per cent), and buy less fresh food (63 per cent). A significant proportion also said that they would be

less likely to participate in education or training (47 per cent) or go to the doctor (45 per cent).

Increasing the payment level is an opportunity to improve the equity of income distribution in Australia.

At the recent Senate inquiry looking into the adequacy of the Newstart Allowance academics, churches, social workers and welfare groups gave evidence supporting a raise to the allowance in order to alleviate poverty and improve job-seekers' ability to re-enter the workforce. Even the Business Council of Australia stated in their submission that the low rate of the Newstart Allowance '...now presents a barrier to employment and risks entrenching poverty'.

In his submission to the inquiry, David Richardson assessed the adequacy of the Newstart Allowance payment and provided evidence that increasing the payment level is an opportunity to improve the equity of income distribution in Australia and increase economic efficiency

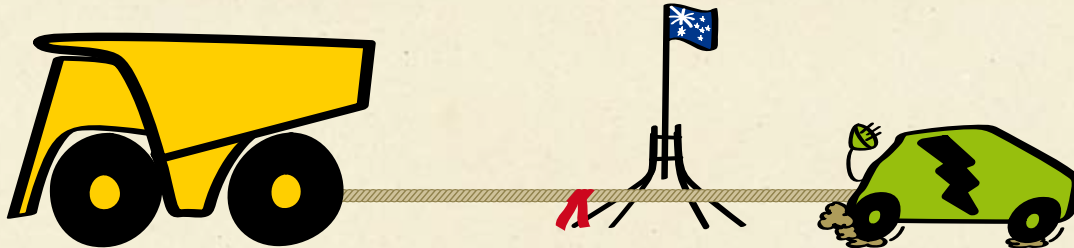
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Carbon price tug-of-war...

"Polluter pays" or "pay the polluter"?

What **WE** pay polluters
\$13.33b Fossil fuel subsidies from government

What **polluters** pay
\$7.69b Carbon price paid by industry



- \$920m** Tax concession for Avgas³
- \$424m** Research and development concessions for mining⁴
- \$1,115m** Accelerated depreciation for planes, oil and gas assets and commercial vehicles³
- \$5,614m** Fuel tax credits for non-road users²
- \$970m** Fringe benefit tax concessions for company cars³
- \$2,851m** Free carbon permits¹
- \$1,009m** Energy security¹
- \$430m** Tax concessions for diesel and liquid petroleum gas³

\$7.69b Revenue from sale of carbon units 2012-13¹

If subsidies are greater than penalties, how effective are current policies as tools for changing behaviour??

and meanwhile...
 News flash
 Martin Ferguson announces \$90m for brown coal:
 "We've got to give it a go and who knows what will come out of it."

The Australia Institute
 Research that matters. www.tai.org.au

Source: 1. Clean Energy Future Approach; 2. Commonwealth Budget 2012-13; 3. Tax Expenditure Statement 2011-14; 4. Jobs & Assistance Review.

The Australia Institute is now on Tumblr! If you would like to view all our infographics on topics ranging from the carbon tax, loneliness and government debt, log on to <http://australiainstitute.tumblr.com/>

Gina's call a bit rich from page 2

The 'infrastructure' that the miners get, however, doesn't so much connect them to us, but to their foreign customers.

If the government paid for a new car factory or steelworks it would be called industry assistance, but if they build a rail line to connect a privately owned coal mine to a privately owned port it's called infrastructure. Yeah, right.

But rather than defend why the taxpayer should pay her industry \$4 billion a year in subsidies and pay for large parts of their mines, the world's wealthiest woman goes on the front foot and attacks those who work for the minimum wage.

According to Rinehart, "If you're jealous of those with more money, don't just sit there and complain. Do something to make more money

yourself — spend less time drinking or smoking and socialising, and more time working."

If there is a shortage of miners and construction workers, why would we be subsidising its already rapid expansion?

Let's be clear, childcare workers in Australia are among our lowest paid. Leaving aside the contemptuous link between low wages and excessive drinking and smoking, what would happen if low-paid Australians took her advice? Do we really want all of our childcare workers, aged care workers and other low-paid workers in the care industry to abandon their responsibilities and head off to the Pilbara?

When the mining boom's high dollar destroys manufacturing jobs in Melbourne and Adelaide, do we really want those workers to leave their families for three weeks in four and move to James Price Point to help build a massive gas plant on top of 40,000-year-old Aboriginal rock art?

The social consequences of Rinehart's policy prescriptions deserve serious attention.

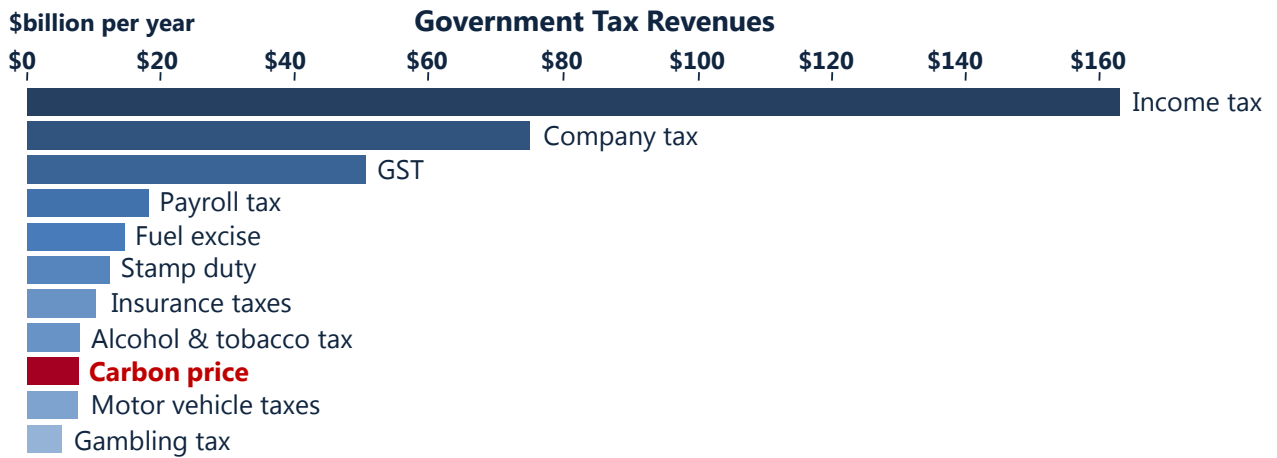
Do Tony Abbott and the 'traditional family values' crowd support the idea of fathers spending three weeks away from their kids each month?

What about the Australian Christian lobby? Does the Christian right support the rise and rise of fly in, fly out families? What is their position on an Australia in which 300 per cent more

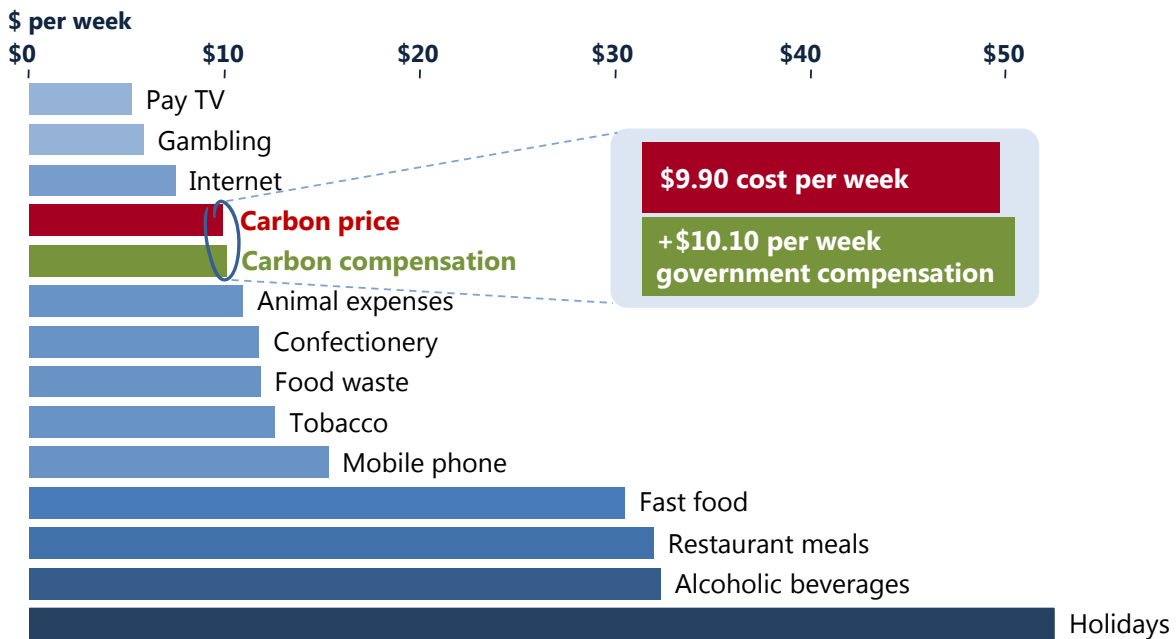
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HOW BIG IS THE 'GREAT BIG NEW TAX'?

It's actually less than the tax collected from alcohol and tobacco...



...and less than the average household spends on mobile phones



In fact, according to Treasury's modelling the majority of households will actually be better off once they receive their tax cut or benefit increases.

A great big new tax or a great big distraction?

Sources:
 Federal government taxes come from:
 Commonwealth Government Budget Paper No.1 2012-13 p5-30
http://www.budget.gov.au/2012-13/content/bp1/html/bp1_bst5-06.htm
 State government taxes come from:
 ABS 5506.0 - Taxation Revenue, Australia, 2010-11 Table 10
<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/5506.02010-11?OpenDocument>
 Household expenditure data comes from:
 ABS 6530.0 - Household Expenditure Survey, Australia: Summary of Results, 2009-10
<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6530.02009-10?OpenDocument>

Carbon price cost, compensation and number of households compensated comes from:
 Clean Energy Future (2011) What a carbon price means for you
http://www.cleanenergyfuture.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/What_a_carbon_price_means_to_you.pdf
 Food waste data comes from:
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Business confusing productivity slowdown with business profitability is understandable; a slowdown in the growth of output per unit of labour is something business can blame on labour itself and see if they can get government to do something about. And while they are at it, they can also complain about labour costs.

Productivity has not declined, though it may well have slowed.

But these are really red herrings; Australia is experiencing massive restructuring and witnessing a continuing global financial crisis. Yet we have all this distraction about whether productivity growth is a bit over one or a bit over two per cent. A bit over one is what we have had in the past decade, but a bit over two was the historic norm.

A one per cent difference can be lost in the definitional problems, which are particularly important when the composition of the economy is changing. For example, we measure labour productivity in mining as output divided by hours worked, even though we know that the quality of the mines worked has declined. What we should have is a measure that tells us how good the labour is at mining a certain type of deposit now, compared with previous years.

In the absence of a better measure of productivity we proceed on the assumption that getting back to two and a bit per cent productivity growth is in fact a major national issue, yet we can be pretty safe in predicting that productivity will not itself be a major issue next election.

Productivity is a topic mainly for the economists and business interests, and the discussion in Australia soon gets down to what the government

can do to boost productivity. There are complaints about reform fatigue, the greater willingness of past governments to tackle reform and so on. The BCA's point on project costs in Australia relative to the US seems to be that somehow the government should fix it.

If we are going to have the cheaper wages agenda we should perhaps balance it with a call for a cheaper gross operating surplus. If we examine the commanding heights of the Australian economy it is clear that they are controlled by monopolies, duopolies and oligopolies that are thriving on a lack of effective competition. Banking, telecommunications, retail, insurance, food and food manufacturing, alcohol and media spring to mind as industries that are renowned for their lack of competition and where prices are too high. There is likely to be at least five years of productivity growth in effectively tackling those uncompetitive sectors of the Australian economy.

Productivity camouflages an argument that is much harder for business to discuss: profit versus wages.

Businesses may well say that high wages reduce their profit and they need government help to lower them. To confuse that with raising productivity is to corrupt the productivity debate. For business, talk of productivity camouflages an argument that is much harder for them to discuss: the argument that business wants more profit at the expense of wage earners. §

Gina's call a bit rich from page 6

parents are unable to sit down with their kids for dinner each night?

It's a simple question, but I bet they won't answer it simply.

Gina Rinehart is clearly a lucky woman. She was lucky enough to inherit an iron ore deposit from her father. She was lucky enough to live in a country

with no death duties or estate duties. She was lucky to own it at a time when the world price of iron ore was at an all-time high. And she is lucky that successive Australian governments have been generous in their provision of subsidies to the mining industry.

But not all Australians can be as lucky as that. To have a go at those who

work hard for the least money is not just insulting, it is obscene.

Wealthy miners like to pretend they are the backbone of the country, but attacking the less well-off is simply spineless.

This article first appeared in The Canberra Times. §

The economy and social justice

In a recent address to the Tasmanian Economics Society Senator, Doug Cameron questioned mainstream economic thinking and presented his vision of a fair and just society based on principles of social justice. This is an edited extract of that speech.

I don't have any faith in the idea that markets are somehow self-correcting or self-regulating. I have no faith in the general proposition that free markets left to their own devices will bring about economic prosperity and general well-being.

Building a good society cannot be done on the cheap.

The 'Great Recession' of 2008 is a glaring example of the failures and weaknesses of neoliberal economic theory [and] was caused by market failures, lack of government regulation and moral and financial failures in the banking and financial systems.

Government intervention — on Keynesian principles — underpinned 210,000 jobs, spared the Australian economy from recession and many families and communities from unemployment and long-term financial hardship.

[T]he myth propagated by the mining industry and the Coalition [was] that the stimulus was unnecessary and the mining industry would have 'saved' Australia from the GFC in any event.

That some of the people making the claim that the mining industry 'saved us' were people who seem to be quite reputable economists leads me to the conclusion that some in the economics profession might be facing some quite serious challenges.

I recently called for the abolition of the Productivity Commission following a speech given by its Chairman, Gary Banks, in which he made a rather curious call for what he obliquely referred to as 'union activities' in the industrial relations system to be possibly subject to the anti-competitive conduct provisions of the Competition and Consumer Act.

Given that the principal function of trade unions is to act as agents for employees in collective bargaining negotiations, I can only assume that Mr Banks thinks that this trade union function should be subject to the anti-competitive conduct provisions of the Competition and Consumer Act.

What I suspect Mr Banks' remarks really constitute is a carefully coded message to business and the Coalition that the Productivity Commission will assist in undermining collective bargaining in this country by providing some very dodgy economic rationale for it under the rubric of competition policy.

[Some] taxation and future spending priorities [are] necessary to transform Australia into a truly good society.

Labor politicians have an obligation to oppose demands that will increase the gap between the rich and the poor and further entrench the power and privilege of the business elite. Even with the abolition of WorkChoices, Australia still doesn't meet its ILO Convention obligations on collective bargaining. This is something a Labor government needs to remedy.

I believe we need a new social contract built on a stable, prosperous, broad-based economy; one with full employment, decent living wages and a social safety net second to none as its central tenets.

We need a new social contract built on a stable, prosperous, broad-based economy.

It would offer an education system underpinned by world class public schools staffed by education professionals whose contribution to society's well-being is recognised and rewarded. It would offer affordable



higher education and vocational training for any qualified applicant. It would be about creating fair and reasonable provision for disability, unemployment and retirement.

All Australians, not just the mining magnates and the elite, are entitled to live with dignity and security.

Australia is the fifth lowest taxing country in the OECD, with a Commonwealth tax to GDP ratio of 22 per cent forecast for 2012-13.

Take just three areas of important reform that are currently on the government's books that could see us becoming such a society if we ever get to implement them:

- Aged Care Reform — the Living Longer, Living Better aged care reform package;
- The National Disability Insurance Scheme; and
- The recommendations of the Gonski review of school funding.

It isn't that these aren't good policies that dominate the public debate; it's whether we can afford to have them.

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Go Home On Time Day

Since The Australia Institute first declared national Go Home On Time Day in 2009, hundreds of thousands of workers have taken part. That working your proper hours is seen as radical by some might be an indication that Australia's addiction to work has gone too far, suggests Serena Rogers.



Australians work some of the longest hours in the developed world. In 2010, full-time employees in Australia worked an average of 42.6 hours a week, more than the OECD average and much more than the supposedly 'standard' working week of 38 hours. We also work more days each year than our counterparts in Europe, with many Australians finding it difficult to access the four weeks of annual leave they are entitled to by law. Australians might think of themselves as a laid-back people with a tendency to take 'sickies' and 'smokos', but the evidence suggests otherwise.

November 21 is your chance to say no to last-minute meetings and go home on time!

Each year Australian workers donate more than two billion hours of unpaid overtime to their employers. Put another way, that's a \$72 billion gift to bosses. Of course there will always be periods of greater and lesser activity in any workplace, but 44 per cent of Australians who work unpaid

overtime report that it is 'compulsory' or 'expected'. Australians are now working three times more hours of unpaid overtime than they volunteer to community organisations.

During his time as Prime Minister John Howard declared the issue of work/life balance to be a barbecue-stopper. But more than ten years on from this statement, the boundaries between work and life are increasingly blurred. While mobile phones and laptops might be considered perks of a job, for those workers who aren't in a position to insist on clear boundaries, 'free time' can often become 'polluted time'. In a workforce of 11.4 million people, some 6.8 million workers experience some degree of time pollution in any given week.

The serious health consequences associated with overwork are well documented. Studies have linked long working hours and time pressure to lifestyle illnesses such as obesity, alcoholism and cardiovascular disease. A study involving Japanese employees who had died from cardiovascular attacks found that more than two in three had, just prior to their deaths, worked in excess of 60 hours a week, 50 overtime hours or more a month, or more than half of their fixed holidays. The Japanese even have a word for death from overwork: *karoshi*.

The 'modern malaise' of not having enough time to do all the things one needs or wants to do can mean that important aspects of life are neglected.

In a survey conducted for the 2010 Go Home On Time Day, respondents were asked about the impact that 'time poverty' had on their life. One in two of those surveyed, and 61 per cent of those working overtime, said they were prevented from spending as much time with family as they would have liked.

Each year Australian workers donate more than two billion hours of unpaid overtime to their employers.

One in two, and 58 per cent of those working overtime, said work stopped them doing physical exercise. Work prevented one in three from eating healthy meals, while one in four reported being too busy to go to the doctor when they probably should. When it comes to health, it would appear that work gets in the way of both prevention and cure.

The Australia Institute conceived national Go Home On Time Day as a light-hearted way to start a serious conversation about the extent of overwork in Australia and its important workplace, health and social consequences. This year it will be held on Wednesday 21 November and will focus on 'insecure work'.

Free time can often become polluted time if you're glued to your smartphone.

While workplace 'flexibility' can have many positive benefits, in instances where it creates uncertainty of tenure or too much unpredictability about hours, then this can also be a cause of stress and anxiety. The impact of the casualisation of the workforce,

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November 21 — National Go Home On Time Day

To keep up-to-date with this year's national Go Home On Time Day, sign-up to the GHOTD Facebook page or check out www.gohomeontimeday.org.au

The Australia Institute's research conducted for past Go Home On Time Days on unpaid overtime, polluted time and time poverty can be downloaded from www.tai.org.au

'nano-free' in fact contained nanomaterials. These brands were supplied by sunscreen ingredient manufacturer, Antaria Limited, and generic sunscreen manufacturer Ross Cosmetics.

The apparently false claims of 'non-nano' or 'nanoparticle free' content by these two Australian manufacturers resulted in leading retail brands making repeated false claims to their customers and wider publics.

Accuracy in labelling and in marketing claims is vital to securing public confidence in this key sector. Australian consumers and workers deserve to be able to make informed choices about whether to use or to avoid nano-sunscreens. Companies deserve to know whether or not there are nano-ingredients in the products they buy and on-sell.

The scandal creates a crisis in consumer confidence, with the

responsibility falling firmly in the lap of the government. If the government had properly regulated and labelled nano-ingredients in sunscreen, we would never be in this mess.

Dr. Gregory Crocetti is a Nanotechnology Campaigner at Friends of the Earth Australia. Adapted from an article that originally appeared in The Canberra Times. §

Could you live on \$245 per week? from page 5

(because Newstart recipients are among the lowest income earners). The reduction in poverty would have flow-on effects such as increased participation in education and training, better access to healthcare and increased consumption of fresh food — all outcomes that have benefits to the Australian economy.

Our submission also examines the logic of keeping the Newstart Allowance payment low as an incentive to push people into work and finds

flaws. There is little direct evidence, either in Australia or overseas, that the unemployment rate is associated with the level of unemployment benefits. In addition, the Newstart Allowance has job-seeking requirements that are designed to ensure that the people who receive the dole are genuinely unemployed.

The Australia Institute gave evidence at the inquiry, arguing that the government could easily afford to increase the unemployment payment

if it reallocated some of the \$30 billion per annum it currently spends on superannuation tax concessions. These concessions are set to rise to \$45 billion per annum by 2015-16. Details can be found in our research papers 'Can the taxpayer afford "self-funded retirement"?' and 'What price dignity?'. These papers, along with our submission to the inquiry and our policy brief 'Are unemployment benefits adequate in Australia?', are available on our website, www.tai.org.au. §

The economy and social justice from page 9

I say we can't afford not to have them. And it's not hard to afford them. But if taxes were raised for the specific purpose of paying for them, Australia's ratio of tax to GDP would increase by just 0.75 per cent [and we] would retain our virility ranking as the fifth lowest taxing country in the OECD and we would have a world-class aged care system, a world-class disability insurance system and a world-class public education system.

We would be a better educated, more productive, longer lived, healthier, fairer country. Australia would [be] an even greater place to live. All Australians, not just the mining magnates and the elite, are entitled to live with dignity and security.

Building a good society cannot be done on the cheap and I am convinced that with proper explanation to the public and courage from government

we can deliver for those who need our help and support.

Social justice demands no less.

Senator Doug Cameron is a Labor Senator for New South Wales and a former National Secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union. §

Go Home On Time Day from page 10

characterised by rapid turnover and movement between types of work, unemployment and periods outside the workforce, and how that affects workers, their families and the broader community, is a relatively new frontier in the debate about work/life balance.

National Go Home On Time Day provides a unique opportunity to encourage a genuine community conversation about the vexed issue of workplace culture — whether that's too much work, too little work or work that does not provide a sense of security.

So, on Wednesday 21 November please join with The Australia Institute and start a dialogue about these issues. But most importantly, for at least one day of the year, try to postpone all those last-minute tasks, emails and late meetings and leave work on time. What you do next is up to you! §

New publications

M Grudnoff, *Measuring Fugitive Emissions: Is coal seam gas a viable bridging fuel?* Policy Brief 41- revised, 27 August 2012

D Richardson, *The profit in home lending*, Technical Brief 16, 25 August 2012

R Denniss and D Richardson, *Can the taxpayer afford 'self-funded retirement'?* Policy Brief 42, 15 August 2012

D Richardson, *Inquiry into the allowance payment system for jobseekers and others*, Submission, 9 August 2012

M Grudnoff, *James Price Point: An economic analysis of the Browse LNG project*, Policy Brief 40, 9 August 2012

D Baker, *All the lonely people: Loneliness in Australia, 2001-2009*, Institute Paper 9, 29 June 2012

Opinion pieces

All opinion pieces written by the Institute's staff can be downloaded from the website www.tai.org.au

Political cowardice on 'self-funded' super, *Australian Financial Review*, 4 September 2012

A bit rich: Gina's call a hard act to swallow, *The Canberra Times*, 1 September 2012

Time to clear the haze of carbon price charges, *The Canberra Times*, 23 August 2012

How our courts are pricing justice out of public reach, *Crikey*, 22 August 2012

Tasmania's forestry sector akin to 'work for the dole', *Crikey*, 21 August 2012

Forestry Tasmania must face reality, *Australian Financial Review*, 20 August 2012

We pay more for most things, *The Canberra Times*, 18 August 2012

Super subsidies: a budget spending secret, *The Canberra Times*, 7 August 2012

The rise of the climate sceptics, *Crikey*, 6 August 2012

Hurting the community, *The Canberra Times*, 4 August 2012

Time to untangle the web of renewable energy policies, *Crikey*, 3 August 2012

What we don't know can hinder us, *Australian Financial Review*, 25 July 2012

Lower cost, lower cover, *The Canberra Times*, 21 July 2012

Why pick green power under new pricing model? *The Canberra Times*, 14 July 2012

What nobody wants to say about the carbon tax package, *Crikey*, 10 July 2012

'KPIs' have little relevance in managing our health system, *The Canberra Times*, 7 July 2012

All the lonely people, *Online Opinion*, 2 July 2012

Rio+20 earns a minus mark for self-indulgent inaction, *Crikey*, 28 June 2012

Newman is digging in wrong hole, *Courier Mail*, 27 June 2012

Have you ever thought you might like to work at the Institute — or know someone who you think would? We will soon be advertising for new positions and will be considering people with a range of skills and expertise. So if you are a researcher or recent graduate, have worked in communications or possess administration experience — or have a mix of these skills and experiences — you might be the person we are looking for.

We will provide more details shortly. To make sure you don't miss out on this opportunity be sure to follow us on Twitter, Facebook or, if you haven't already done so, sign up for the Institute's updates via the website, www.tai.org.au.

