

Labor for Refugees



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WHAT DOES LABOR FOR REFUGEES STAND FOR?

Labor for Refugees is made up of party members and trade unionists who, in 2001, committed themselves to updating and improving Labor Party Policy on refugees and asylum seekers. We are largely rank and file activists in the party, many who have been with Labor for Refugees since 2001. We are NOT an official arm of the Labor Party and do not speak for the party.

At the 2002 NSW State Conference, Labor for Refugees successfully led the push for the improvements to NSW State Party Policy on refugees and people seeking asylum. NSW State Party Policy on refugees and people seeking asylum was updated again in 2007. Labor for Refugees was instrumental in the improvements to National Policy at the National Conferences of the ALP in 2004, 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2015. At the last National Conference, improvements to Labor's refugee policies were made, but not to the extent of our major Labor for Refugees priorities being adopted.

The National Conference in 2015 introduced a number of policy changes that committed Labor in Government to:-

- \$450 million to be given to the UN for regional processing in Indonesia so that asylum seekers do not have to get on boats.
- An increase in the humanitarian intake to 27,000.
- Children and families out of detention as much as possible.
- A Children's Commissioner to be charged with the protection and safety of children while in detention including the power to prosecute for detention centre abuses.
- A commitment to the more humane treatment of asylum seekers in detention.
- The abolition of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs).
- The commitment of a Labor Government to enshrining our international obligations in federal legislation.

The 2016 Federal Election resulted in the narrow re-election of the Turnbull Government with a one seat majority. The next National Conference will take place in July 2018 and once again, Labor for Refugees is seeking more improvements to party policy and platform. We have made submissions to the National Policy Forum and will be involved once again in consultation on changes to party policy. Another Federal Election is due soon. It is important to get party policy and platform right before Labor returns to government.

IS THE US DEAL ENOUGH?

The current Federal Coalition Government negotiated a deal with the Obama Administration to have America take 1,250 refugees from offshore detention, after it was declared illegal under the Constitution of Papua New Guinea, to continue holding refugees on Manus. The current Australian Government refuses to accept them because of its own ban on allowing them entry to Australia. There was some doubt with the election of Trump as President that this deal would be honoured, but after some humiliation for Malcolm Turnbull on this issue from President Trump, the deal went ahead.

54 refugees were sent to the US in 2017 and another 58 in January 2018. The UN now estimates there are 800 refugees in offshore detention yet to be placed. The New Zealand Labor Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, has made several offers to take 150 asylum seekers but the current Australian Government will not allow them to go to New Zealand as they fear they could make their way to Australia from there. Bill Shorten has committed Labor in government to sending asylum seekers from offshore detention to New Zealand.

NAURU and MANUS

WHAT IS LABOR DOING ABOUT REFUGEES AND OFFSHORE DETENTION?

After scandalous allegations were published in The Guardian newspaper about physical and sexual abuse on Nauru, the Senate, at Labor's initiative, held an Inquiry into those allegations. That Inquiry, chaired by Labor Senator Louise Pratt, reported on the 21st April 2017. Labor for Refugees' response to the Inquiry is embodied in an Urgency Motion drafted by Labor for Refugees Victoria, which was passed unanimously by the Victorian State Conference in May 2017 and also by the NSW State Conference in July 2017. The Conference motion urged Shadow Cabinet to accept all the recommendations of the Senate Committee.

WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?

The recommendations of the Senate Committee asked the government:-

- to work with Australia's Asia-Pacific neighbours to establish a regional framework for the processing of claims for asylum which would reduce the business of people smuggling by ensuring that people seeking asylum, do not need to attempt to reach Australia in order to have their claim for asylum processed in a safe location
- to review the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 to ensure that Comcare can exercise its regulatory powers in relation to Australian workplaces outside Australia's geographical jurisdiction, in a timely and straightforward manner. It stated that Comcare has the capacity to investigate very serious incidents, which could include suicides and serious assaults. It is vital that the WHS Act can be applied in a straightforward manner in relation to incidents within the Nauru and Manus Refugee Processing Centres.

WHAT AUSTRALIANS REALLY THINK ABOUT REFUGEES AND PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM?

The latest survey by The Australia Institute shows that 72% of respondents think that those who arrive by boat should be allowed to stay in Australia if they are found to be refugees. The results amongst Labor voters are more significant. Regarding people who arrive by boat, 43% support the statement:

They should be sent to camps on Manus Island and Nauru, and after having their claims assessed, those found to be genuine refugees should be allowed to stay in Australia. Those who are not found to be genuine refugees should be deported.

A further 24% support the statement:

They should be brought to Australia, and after having their claims assessed, those found to be genuine refugees should be allowed to stay in Australia. Those who are not found to be genuine refugees should be deported.

Labor for refugees believes that Australia needs to stop supporting a policy which currently punishes the very victims who are trying to escape persecution and often death. Failure of political will and leadership has led us to the morass we are facing. It is time for bold policy and action.

LABOR FOR REFUGEES NSW POLICY ON PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

1. Ensure no children are kept in detention. Rather, they will be placed into community-run reception centres together with their families.
2. Increase Australia's humanitarian intake progressively to 50,000 per year.
3. Close off-shore processing centres in Manus, Nauru and Christmas Island and transfer all detainees to Australia for on-shore processing. This measure will provide savings of up to \$1 billion per year to be spent on other priorities.
4. End indefinite detention and implement a 30 day processing rule to be included in the Immigration Act (Cth).
5. Provide legal aid for people seeking asylum.
6. Abolish Temporary Protection Visas.
7. Increase funding for the UNHCR.
8. Have mandatory reporting of abuse in detention.
9. Create independent bodies to:
 - 9.1 advocate for asylum seeker children, with the capacity to bring legal action on their behalf;
 - 9.2 provide oversight of detention centres;
 - 9.3 establish an independent commission to inform the public on the facts on refugees and people seeking asylum.
10. Ensure that the provisions of the UN Refugee Convention and UN human rights instruments, to which Australia is signatory, are included in Australian asylum seeker and refugee domestic law and policy.
11. To achieve the cooperation required to reach sustainable regional processing arrangements, reject policies which turn away asylum-seeker boats.
12. Engage with Australia's neighbours to seek humane and effective solutions to the movement of people seeking asylum through the region. This approach will include multilateral engagement, particularly through the Bali process.
13. Maintain levels of foreign aid sufficient to address the root causes, improve conditions and the rule of law in the places from which people are escaping.