

Sally McManus, Secretary ACTU

ACTU Congress 2018

Secretary's Welcome Speech

17th July, 2018

I'd like to pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet the Yuggera & Turrbal people.

I would also like to pay my respects to all the elders past and present.

The ACTU has an Elders Council and I'd like to acknowledge them:

Jo Kerr

Terry Mason

Jo Willmot

Terry O'Shane

Charlene Emzin-Boyd

Kevin Tory

Please stand. And please stand any other indigenous elders with us today.

Now please stand and join them, all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates to Congress. The representation and activism of ATSI union members has been growing right across our movement.

The First Nations Workers Alliance was established just over a year ago. This Alliance is for Community Development Program workers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander union members. We have some CDP workers here – welcome. It is not acceptable that people work for free, it is not acceptable that we have a racially discriminatory program. We will campaign to have this program abolished and for real jobs for people in regional and remote communities.

Non-indigenous union members can also join FNWA as supporters. So stand up if you have joined as a supporter of the First Nations Workers Alliance.

Ok – all those who are not standing, please join by the end of the conference.

Thank you everyone, have a seat.

Please stand up if you or one of your parents was born overseas.

Our movement represents the diversity of the Australian workforce in one of the most multi-cultural countries in the world. Thank you and have a seat.

We had an aim of reaching 50% women at this Congress, the closest we have got in the past is just over 40%. So, let's see how we have gone. Hands up all the women in the room.

I want to say to all the delegates who are under the age of 30.

This maybe your first Congress, enjoy it, you will remember it (well, parts of it).

Everyone in this room wants to address generational inequality – we all believe in handing on something better. One day it will be your turn to do the same.

We have some international guests here with us - please stand:

Pierre Habbard the new Trade Union Advisor Committee General
Secretary to the OECD;

Shoya Yoshida the General Secretary of the ITUC- Asia-Pacific region;

Josua Mata the General Secretary of Centro national union centres in
the Philippines;

Roderico DiMaano President of the KMU National Centre in the
Philippines;

Maung Muang the General Secretary of the Council of Trade Unions of
Burma;

Ath Thorn the President of the Cambodian Labour Confederation;

Sam Huggard the Secretary of the New Zealand Council of Trade
Unions;

Bruce Raynor from the US trade union movement; and of course

Danny Glover global actor and union activist;

Thank you all for being here with us.

Pierre – I think you win the prize for the person who has travelled the furthest.

Stand up if you live or grew up in rural or regional Australia; anywhere outside our capital cities.

We are not a city based movement, we are everywhere.

Some of our biggest achievements and biggest battles happened on farms, railways, mines in regional Australia. From the railway strikes to Wave Hill.

Now I'd really like to hear just from the Queenslanders in this room. I

say union, you say power, let's hear it -

- West Australians
- Victorians
- South Australia or the NT
- All the people from Tassy
- New South Welshpeople and the ACT.

Some of our fellow trade unionists had to go through a pretty tough time last year and I think we should give them a big warm union cheer. Please stand up all our rainbow, LGBTIQ trade unionists.

Our union movement is one of the oldest in the world, it has been here in Australia for around 10 generations.

Such a short time when you think of over 2000 generations of people who walked on this land; but this is certainly long enough for a culture to develop.

Because, despite our differences, our different unions and different industries we work in, at our core we are the same.

As trade unionists we share the same core beliefs and values.

We are about supporting each other. We stand up for equality, we stand up for fairness, and we believe we are stronger together.

We are the people, the movement of people, that stands up to the powerful in this country. We are the voice of those without power. We take that individual quiet, small voice and make it loud and powerful by banding together.

We are the people who stand up against injustice, even if it takes courage, even when it is not personally convenient to do so.

We do this because we believe in the fair go for everyone.

We know union members before us, fought for and won the rights working people have today and we are the custodians of these rights.

Our values, who we are as Australian trade unionists are handed down to us, passed on by deed and they are shaped by what we go through together.

That's why we love the Eureka flag.

That's why we celebrate the 8 hour day victory, every year for the last 162 years.

That's why we celebrate May Day together.

That's why we will never forget WorkChoices.

That's why in our culture the word "scab" is used as an accurate description of someone's behaviour;

And that's why the word "comrade" means something a bit more than a mate.

This is a room full of union leaders.

We all inherit this culture.

It is the job of all of us to pass on to the next generation, not just the living standards we have won, but our values.

Because those values are the ones that guide us, no matter the external circumstances, no matter how muddy the waters get, no matter how tough the times.

No matter what we face, we face it *together* and the trade union movement of Australia, no matter what they throw at us, will *always* have the back of working Australians.

Our culture is the opposite to the selfish, uncaring one that neoliberalism promotes. Where people without power are told to “fend for themselves”, where your value is a measure of your wealth, where we should all be competing against each other in a race where there must be many losers and it is ok for those losers to live in poverty.

This culture tells us to cheer for the Gina Rhineharts and not for the underdog.

But that's not us. It will never be us.

And we believe in something fundamentally different to Pauline Hanson. We never look down and blame our fellow worker, whether they be unemployed or a migrant, for the fact our jobs have been casualised or our pay has been cut.

The unemployed worker and the migrant are our *brothers* and our *sisters*. We know we are all in this together.

The reason why our jobs are less secure and our pay is not keeping up with the cost of living is because big business has too much power, the rules are broken and the Turnbull Government refuses to fix them.

The things we believe in – sticking by your mates, supporting the underdog and standing up for the fair go is far removed from Malcolm Turnbull or Pauline Hanson.

I think who we are, the values of the Australian trade union movement are those that most Australians not just prefer, but they yearn for.

Our values were handed down to us by our union elders. Please stand, all the retired union members that are here.

This is our golden generation. The generation of 50% union membership that won:

Medicare,

Superannuation,

The 38 hour week,

World leading minimum wages,

Equal pay for equal work for women.

Workers compensation for all

I could go on.

Thank you.

This Congress is a unique opportunity for every person here.

You are here with your unions, people you know, but here you get a chance to meet people from other industries and from other parts of the country who also represent working people.

Use this opportunity to talk to and to meet others. Be generous in your sharing and the things you have learnt along the way. If this is your first Congress, you have here in this room a wealth of knowledge from 1000 of the best.

So I have a mission for everyone.

By the end of the conference I'd like to do this. Find a person you have never met before and have a chat to them. And if you hit it off, use your phone to record a short video of your new comrade and introduce them to the rest of us.

Just a one minute video.

Those under 30, go interview an elder. Upload them to your social media. Tag Australian Unions and hashtag ACTUCongress18 and ChangeTheRules so we can all share them and see. If you need some help see the ACTU social media team.

We will play the best at the end of the Congress.

These short clips will show us how, despite our differences, our values unite us.

We draw strength from that unity, because we need that strength as we are at 15% union density.

In one generation our membership has dropped from over 40% to 15%. This is because:

- All the support and protections for union membership were taken away by John Howard.
- Business walked away from working together. They made this decision.

- With globalisation came multinationals who are driven by one thing, maximising their profits and breaking organised workers who stood in their way
- Industries have changed, our economy has changed. We have lost industries that took a generation to organise: car manufacturing, textiles etc. The new industries cannot be organised over night
- Insecure work has grown. Now less than half the population is in a permanent full-time job. 1 in 10 in the workforce is on a temporary work visa.

But let there be no mistake.

15% union membership and the weakening of workplace rights over the last 30 years has created record inequality, insecure work and record low wage growth.

All Australians suffer when union membership declines.

Australia needs a strong trade union movement.

Because it will be us, only us, – working people acting together - that can turn around inequality. We are the ones, we have *always* been the ones who make our country fairer.

But right now working people are going backwards *and* we face record inequality.

Our living standards, our pay and our job security are going backwards.

Families are struggling to pay the bills. Australian workers are watching while their employer is returning profits to shareholders but their bills go up and their pay goes nowhere.

And people are realising something is very wrong.

Young people are facing a harsher, unfairer world of gig jobs with no rights. The promise of rising living standards as our country becomes wealthier is not happening.

Family budgets, which make up 60% of the economy, are being eaten away with the rising cost of living. Something has to give. The bills must be paid. Spending on things that are not necessary goes first.

Small, local businesses know that when people, their customers, begin to worry how they will make ends meet the knock-on effects are less spending, fewer hours for workers and a vicious downward cycle.

And all the while, the Turnbull government *barely mentions* the wage crisis we are experiencing.

Enough is enough. It is time for us to demand it.

Australians need a pay rise.

Australians *deserve* a pay rise.

From the reserve bank governor to the bus driver who stops outside this building, everyone knows there is a wage crisis in this country. It is dragging down the living standards of working people and driving up the cost of living.

Malcolm Turnbull and so called experts talk about wages rising...eventually... they talk about economic models of supply and demand....but they *refuse* to talk about the fact that working people need sufficient power to successfully demand pay rises.

Under the current rules, Australians will not be able to demand and win their fair share as the current workplace rules prevent them from having the *demand* power they need.

We have a serious, serious structural problem. The power balance between big business and Australian workers is out of whack and it must be fixed.

We cannot have a fairer society, we cannot have the pay rise we deserve, unless the system is made fair.

Any Government that cares about inequality, that thinks working people should be given a fair go, must change the rules.

Change the rules to deliver more secure work.

Change the rules so working people can put the “demand” back into “supply and demand”.

We the trade union movement will fight for these changes because of our values.

Because we want a better world for the next generation.

Because we will never accept a life of permanent economic stress and insecurity at a time of record prosperity for the few.

Because this is not the fair go we have always believed in.

Our values drive us to fight inequality.

Our values drive us to stand up for the fair go.

Our values call us to call out the problem and to go out and fight for change.

We draw on the lessons of history and the achievements made by our movement in tough times past.

We know change will not come unless we go out and fight for it.

And today I call on all of you.

It is time to ramp up our campaign to change the rules.

We need to take it up a notch!

We need to demand the change needed so Australians get the pay rises they deserve.

And we know how to do this.

We know how to act together, with unity and purpose when the going gets tough.

We did this during the MUA dispute 20 years ago and as we did in the YRAW campaign 11 years ago.

When we reach top gear, it is when we *organise* at all levels. We can take a message out far and wide and win the debate when we organise in: our workplaces, our industries, our unions, through our mighty TLCs into communities and bring it all together nationally.

This is what we need to do now.

We need to take this message out – the rules need to change so working people get a fair go. The rules need to change so we have more secure jobs and pay rises.

So let's commit at this Congress, this gathering of union leaders to be the generation that turns the corner.

- Turns the corner on inequality
- Turns the corner on union membership
- Turns the corner on insecure work

- Delivers a new system so all Australians get their fair share through decent pay rises

Let it be our generation whose union values shine through and lead our country away from division, away from inequality, away from a world that that is run for and by a few.

While the world changed around us, we have stuck by what we believe in. Let our values guide us and let's lead the way to a better, fairer world.

Let's change those rules.