

UNION DELEGATES AND ACTIVISTS POLICY

ACTU CONGRESS 2000

1. Union Education

1.1 Delegates and active members lie at the heart of union strength. We commit ourselves to ensuring that these members have the knowledge and skills to play their role in building the power of working people in Australia.

1.2 Accordingly, unions will;

- (i) Review our education activity to ensure that it is appropriate, flexible and suited to the needs of delegates and activists. Education programs will become an integral part of organising activity within the union.
- (ii) Share their initiatives in the development of new techniques and curriculum with the ACTU Organising Centre so that the whole movement can benefit from these improvements.
- (iii) Encourage our educators to reinvent their role so that they become a resource to organising as well as the person delivering training.
- (iv) Consider whether they should train their own activists to deliver education to members so that as large a number of members as possible are touched by our educational activity.
- (v) Allocate significant resources to union education.
- (vi) Review their access to union training leave. Where possible, these provisions will be inserted into Awards or agreements.
- (vii) Examine where a Paid Education Leave (PEL) scheme can be introduced and on what terms. A strategy will then be developed which spreads any initial gains made to a wider group of employers.

1.3 In addition, the ACTU will, through its Organising Centre;

- (i) Review the content of delegate education to ensure that is up to date in content and meets the needs of both unions and activists;
- (ii) Facilitate joint education projects between projects between union representatives in Australia and other countries in our region;

- (iii) Set up a Trust or similar vehicle to act as a bank for PEL contributions. With the maximum amount of transparency, each union will then be able to bank employer contributions in their account and withdraw them as they are needed for the provision of paid leave or the costs of training; and
- (iv) Maintain and develop its relationships with union education centres in East Asia and the Pacific.

2. Charter of Workplace Union Delegates Rights

2.1 The Rights of Delegates

Strong, effective and representative unions are essential to building a fair and just society. Unions provide the democratic organisation for working people to have a say in their workplace.

Workplace union delegates hold a vital position in the union. The union delegate has the key role of representing the collective and individual hopes, aspirations and needs of their work colleagues. They are critical to the improvement of pay, employment conditions and health and safety.

The union delegate can bring together the individual creativity, skills, and knowledge of a group of people at a workplace to improve how a job is done. Australian working people have always been prepared to make a positive contribution to make sure the enterprises in which they work prosper. This has been central to building a strong and confident nation.

At a time of rapid workplace change and increased competitive pressure from the global market place, the role of the workplace union delegate is even more critical, and more necessary.

It is time that workplace union delegates receive recognition, through a Charter of Workplace Union Delegate Rights, for the key role they play. These rights should not have to be bargained. They should be accepted rights in a decent society.

In many workplaces around the country employers with vision and commitment already recognise and accept the rights of workplace union delegates. For those employers the Charter will formalise, in part or full, what already exists.

With rights comes responsibility. Workplace union delegates need to act in good faith, and to do the best they can for their work colleagues together or on their individual needs.

The Charter of Workplace Union Delegate Rights is a guide for fair standards for all union delegates and will be pursued by unions for inclusion in collective bargaining agreements, award entitlements, and in Australian law as rights for endorsed workplace union delegates.

2.2 Union delegates shall have:

- i. The right to be treated fairly and to perform their role as union delegate without any discrimination in their employment;
- ii. the right to formal recognition by the employer that endorsed union delegates speak on behalf of union members in the workplace;
- iii. the right to bargain collectively on behalf of those they represent;
- iv. the right to consultation, and access to reasonable information about the workplace and the business;
- v. the right to paid time to represent the interests of members to the employer and industrial tribunals;
- vi. the right to reasonable paid time during normal working hours to consult with union members;
- vii. the right to reasonable paid time off to participate in the operation of the union;
- viii. the right to reasonable paid time off to attend accredited union education;
- ix. the right to address new employees about the benefits of union membership at the time that they enter employment;
- x. the right to reasonable access to telephone, facsimile, photocopying, internet and e-mail facilities for the purpose of carrying out work as a delegate and consulting with workplace colleagues and the union;
- xi. the right to place union information on a notice board in a prominent location in the workplace;
- xii. the right to take reasonable leave to work with the union.

These rights are basic and fair. Union delegates are entitled to know their role is recognised and respected. Unions will campaign to build these rights over time into workplaces across the country.