

Future Strategies – Part 1

Unions and The Wider Society

Policy

ACTU CONGRESS 2003

Policy Framework

1. In the implementation of Section 1, Unions and the Wider Society, of the *Future Strategies - Unions Working For a Fairer Society* report, the key issues for unions and the ACTU over the next three years include:
 - (a) building support for union values;
 - (b) pursuing union objectives through political activity;
 - (c) establishing the basis for an improved industrial relations culture; and
 - (d) improving access to unions.

Union Values

2. Unions will build support for union values through:
 - (a) Promotion of the Statement of Australian Union Values adopted by the ACTU Congress.
 - (b) Working with members and delegates to develop and adopt a statement of values for the union.
 - (c) Drawing upon the union's statement of values in developing the objectives of campaigns, in union education courses, in explaining union objectives in the media, and in union political activity.
 - (d) Ensuring the conduct of union officers, staff and delegates reflect and reinforce the union statement of values.

Political Activity

3. Unions and the ACTU will continue to improve the living standards and working lives of workers and their families through political as well as industrial organisation. The broad objectives of union political activity over the next three years will include:
 - (a) The development of wider and more democratic involvement of union members in political activity in support of their industrial and social goals.
 - (b) The facilitation of policy discussion in the workplace.
 - (c) The involvement of members in political lobbying and community activity.
 - (d) The convening of forums in Federal and State electorates at which workers and their families can engage with politicians.
 - (e) The active use of Labor Advisory Council structures at the national, state and territory levels to advance union goals.
4. Congress recognises and respects the political diversity of unions and their members. It is also clear, however, that to be more effective in representing the interests of working people unions must work with greater unity and clarity of purpose in their political activity. For this reason the ACTU, Labour Councils and affiliated unions will:
 - (a) cooperate to improve the coordination of political activity through the ACTU;
 - (b) seek to achieve a common set of priority objectives through political activity; and
 - (c) where affiliated to the Australian Labor Party, advance the common set of priority objectives in ALP forums.
5. The common set of priority objectives to be pursued over the next three years include:
 - (a) the right for employees to collectively bargain, and to be represented by a union;
 - (b) improved rights and portability of entitlements for casual and labour hire workers, including the right to permanent employment for long term casuals, and a code to regulate contracting and labour hire;
 - (c) improved minimum wages through the national and state wage cases;
 - (d) work and family rights, including paid maternity leave; and

- (e) right of entry and delegates rights, including funding for delegate education.
6. The ACTU is authorised to coordinate the development of the specific legislative and policy changes required to implement these objectives.

Industrial Relations Culture

7. The industrial relations culture in Australia is too often the product of conflict, and is characterised by the routine refusal of employers to collectively bargain, to impose individual contracts, victimise union activists, or otherwise exploit workers as a response to competitive commercial pressures.
8. Congress resolves to work towards a more constructive industrial relations culture, for the purpose of:
- (a) achieving better outcomes for workers in pay and employment conditions;
 - (b) establishing an improved environment for union organisation;
 - (c) achieving a better balance between the interests of employees and their unions, and the commercial interests of employers; and
 - (d) contributing to workplace level and national economic prosperity.
9. To establish the basis for an improved industrial relations culture Congress calls upon Governments and employers to respect basic employee rights including:
- (a) the right to join and be represented by a union;
 - (b) the right to collectively bargain;
 - (c) delegates rights;
 - (d) decent employment standards underpinning the rapidly changing labour market, for all workers; and
 - (e) access for workers to training, vocational education and career opportunities.
10. In working towards a more constructive industrial relations culture unions will, over the next three years, build political and industrial support for the basic employee rights set out in paragraph 9 above.

Improving Access To Unions

11. Congress recognises that unions must become more accessible to workers, particularly in the sectors of the economy where employment is growing. Continuing effort is needed to develop union services and activities which:
 - (a) complement organising;
 - (b) assist in the retention of members;
 - (c) enable youth, women and other groups to be involved in union activity; and
 - (d) enable easier access to information about unions, particularly for young people as they enter the workforce.

Member Services

12. Quality, value-for-money member services remain an important complement to union membership and can assist organising efforts and membership retention. Congress resolves that the member services priorities for the ACTU over the next three years, in support of unions, will be:
 - (a) Promoting industry superannuation and Members Equity financial and banking services to members through union communications and at the workplace.
 - (b) Enabling members to access new technologies through Virtual Communities.
 - (c) Providing members with a choice of ACTU endorsed financial advisers.
 - (d) Negotiating and distributing other non-industrial member services that add value to membership.

ACTU Call Centre 'Union Hotline'

13. Research consistently demonstrates people want to contact unions, but often do not know how. The current White Pages advertising of the ACTU Call Centre contact number delivers important but modest inbound call results. But when the number has been more widely publicised in conjunction with a specific issue or campaign there has been a very strong response from potential union members.

14. It is not the role of the ACTU to compete with existing union call centres. However, Congress believes that a well publicised and resourced central call centre "Union Hotline" could provide workers with a logical and direct contact point for unions.
15. Congress therefore authorises the ACTU to develop a Union Hotline with the following features:
 - (a) an ability to target specific workforce groups, such as casual workers and young people;
 - (b) a focus on developing cooperation and agreed referral and lead servicing protocols with participating unions;
 - (c) a focus on the long term development and marketing of a 'Union Hotline' number; and
 - (d) the effective use of free and where appropriate paid media advertising to support campaigns.
16. The program would be managed through the existing ACTU call centre infrastructure as a 12 month pilot to be reviewed by ACTU Executive.
17. To maximise the recruitment and organising opportunities that arise from call centre inquiries, and referrals, particularly of non union members, unions will examine and where appropriate review procedures for handling inquiries from non union members.