

Future Strategies – Part 3
Unions Reaching Out To New Members
Policy
ACTU CONGRESS 2003

Policy Framework

1. In the implementation of Part 3, Unions reaching out to new members, of *the Future Strategies - Unions Working For a Fairer Australia* report, the key issues for unions and the ACTU over the next three years include:
 - (a) Building the amount of union resources, research and planning dedicated to the challenge of growing union membership.
 - (b) Developing specialist skills and expertise required by unions to implement growth strategies, including expanding the use in unions of specialist new member organising teams.
 - (c) Increasing the use of innovative organising tactics including cooperative multi-union industry and regional organising strategies.
 - (d) Continuing to build organising focused approaches to union coverage.

Resource, Research & Planning for Union Growth

2. Unions will work to increase the amount of union resources dedicated to growing union membership and improve the quantity and quality of research and planning used to underpin union growth strategies through:
 - (a) Considering options to fund union growth such as, dedicating a greater portion of recurrent union expenditures to growth, establishing a dedicated union organising fund, or including a growth fee or levy in union membership dues.
 - (b) Increasing the use by unions of industry and workplace mapping, research, analysis and planning to target and implement organising campaigns in non-union workplaces.

3. At the 1973 ACTU Congress unions decided that all affiliates should raise their membership fees to 1% of the All Industries Average Minimum Award Rate. This position was reaffirmed in 1985.
4. Since that time there have been significant developments in three key areas affecting the relevance of this policy and the need to update it
 - (a) Changes in the wage fixing system in Australia and the introduction of enterprise bargaining mean the All Industries Average Minimum Award Rate is no longer a relevant or reflective indicator of employee earnings. A new and relevant benchmark indicator is required.
 - (b) The demands on union resources have been increased by the introduction of enterprise bargaining; the impact of economic change on union membership; and an industrial relations system and Federal Government that encourage conflict.
 - (c) Unions are increasingly focused on the need to develop and fund strategies to renew, rebuild and grow union effectiveness and membership.
5. Recognising these developments Congress resolves to update ACTU policy on union membership fees as follows:
 - (a) As a guide and over time, unions should aim to establish base union membership fees at a level equal to 1% of Full-time Adult Weekly Ordinary Time Earnings (AWOTE). This would currently represent a weekly fee of approximately \$9 per week.
 - (b) The AWOTE benchmark is based on full-time earnings and unions should consider establishing reduced fees for part-time or casual employees as appropriate.
 - (c) Increases in union fees or levies should be specifically targeted at funding organising campaigns and strategies for union renewal and membership growth - including union education and activist development.
 - (d) The democratic involvement of union delegates and members is an important part of any proposal to increase the level of union membership fees.
6. It is recognised that from time to time unions may also need to adjust the level of membership fees to cover increased union operating costs and to fund improved service delivery to union members.

Specialist Organising Teams

7. Unions will work to develop the use and competencies of specialist new member organising teams in unions by:
 - (a) Unions actively considering the establishment of teams of specially selected and trained staff lead by experienced Lead Organisers to organise in new areas.
 - (b) Ensure new member organising teams are properly resourced and able to focus exclusively on organising in non-union or poorly organised workplaces or industries.
 - (c) Developing the use of project focused approaches to new member organising.
 - (d) Building the new member organising skills and experience of Australian Lead Organisers through the establishment of an ACTU Lead Organiser Exchange Program with appropriate overseas unions.

Innovative Organising Tactics & Union Organisation

8. Unions will work to build the effectiveness of organising campaigns in new areas, industries and workplaces through the use of innovative approaches to organising tactics, union cooperation and union coverage. Key initiatives over the next three years will include:
 - (a) Increasing the use of organising tactics that maximise the opportunities for one-on-one discussions with non-union workers (face-to-face or over the phone) out of hours and away from the workplace.
 - (b) Actively encouraging the development of joint union approaches to organising in industries and areas.
 - (c) Actively encouraging the development of joint, cooperative or single union approaches to organising in regional areas.
 - (d) Continuing to build a comprehensive union campaigning capacity that integrates industrial, legal, political, community, investor and consumer activity to deliver better outcomes for working Australians.

Organising Focused Approaches to Union Coverage

9. The main objective of the ACTU and affiliated unions is to improve wages and employment conditions. The method for achieving this is through union membership and organisation. ACTU policy on union

coverage and organisation should promote union membership growth and union organisation, as the means to protect and improve wages and conditions of employment.

10. Establishing cooperative and effective working arrangements between unions often achieves the most beneficial outcomes for workers and unions. In cases where union coverage does overlap, the guiding principle should be to minimise competition and increase cooperation between unions.

Existing Areas of Organisation and Coverage

11. The ACTU and unions are opposed to destructive competitive unionism and will maintain respect for established areas of union membership and organisation.
12. For the policy to be effective, there must be a collective union commitment to stop the poaching of members. In this context, the basic determinant of union representative rights is the rules coverage of a union, and not 'freedom of choice' for members to transfer membership to whatever union they choose. The recruitment by one union of another union's members will not be supported by the ACTU, unless it is consistent with the application of this policy.
13. Recourse in the first instance to legal avenues to attempt to secure rights to represent employees outside a union's constitutional coverage impedes the prospect of resolving differences within the ACTU and union structure, and can consume important union resources. Unions will not commence any legal avenues without first having referred the matter to the ACTU for consideration consistent with this policy, and to enable a reasonable timeframe to resolve the matter by agreement.
14. Where there is conflict between unions over the right to represent union members or employees an affiliate may refer the dispute to the ACTU. The emphasis must be on the achievement of agreement between the unions. If agreement cannot be reached the process to be followed will include consideration by the ACTU Officers, and if necessary the Executive, of:
 - (a) the views of the unions and all of the issues involved;
 - (b) the views of the members;
 - (c) the best method of protecting and advancing union membership and organisation;
 - (d) the best method of protecting and advancing wages and employment conditions;

- (e) whether an open process of recruitment was undertaken and whether there were attempts to undermine or prohibit effective organisation by unions with coverage rights;
 - (f) the nature of any agreement with the employer, and whether it has the support of the members, or involves wages and conditions below established standards in the area;
 - (g) the history of award and agreement coverage and the representation rights of other unions; and
 - (h) whether a Greenfields site/agreement or a new major resource or construction site is involved. These sites require special consideration. Experience has shown that union membership and organisation may be stronger, particularly at major resource projects, when the traditional coverage of each union is respected. Construction sites are not Greenfields sites and traditional coverage should prevail.
15. The ACTU will attempt to broker agreement between the unions to resolve the issues. The ACTU may also make recommendations for resolution of the dispute, recognising that the decisions of the ACTU depend upon the collective commitment of unions to resolving differences within union processes. The ACTU may also make submissions to tribunals if the matter is contested in these forums.

The Responsibility to Organise

16. The first priority each union has is the responsibility of maximising union membership within existing areas of coverage. Planning, analysis and the establishment of priority areas for organisation are required. The ACTU will provide support to unions genuinely attempting to organise within their area of coverage.
17. Each affiliate has an obligation under this policy to outline to the ACTU a strategy to organise in their areas of coverage to increase union membership and union density rates.

Union Growth Strategy - New Member Organising

18. The key objective of policy in relation to non-union areas is to promote membership growth ('non-union area' generally means an area of work or workplace where the employees are not union members). Union membership and organisation strategies should focus on the recruitment of non-members.
19. Union growth strategies based upon the bidding down of wages and employment standards in order to secure employer support and/or coverage will not be supported by the ACTU. Unions should not compete on the basis of discounted union membership fees.

20. A union growth strategy that involves the recruitment and organisation of employees outside the union's coverage, may be supported by the ACTU in the following circumstances:
- (a) The union proposing to recruit employees outside their coverage can demonstrate a coherent timetable/strategy to organise in existing areas of their coverage where union membership density is low.
 - (b) It is a non-union area.
 - (c) The union with coverage is not organising in the area and there is not a competitive position between unions.
 - (d) The union with coverage has no genuine timetable/strategy to organise in the area.
 - (e) The union proposing to recruit employees outside of their coverage can demonstrate a community of interest with the employees it proposes to recruit.
 - (f) It promotes union membership growth and organisation.
 - (g) There is no collusion between a union and employer to deny a union with legal coverage access to effective organising opportunities.
 - (h) There is a proper plan with well defined targets and resources.
 - (i) There is a feasible plan for obtaining and exercising representative rights.
 - (j) Wages and employment standards will be protected.
 - (k) There is a prospect of reasonable employee support.
 - (l) There will be effective representation involving a single bargaining unit where appropriate.
21. In such circumstances a union would need to first consult with the ACTU and the relevant unions and reach agreement, or demonstrate points (a) - (l) above apply.