

**Future Strategies – Part 3**  
**Unions Reaching Out to New Members**  
**Additional Background Material**  
***ACTU CONGRESS 2003***

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**NOTE**

The ACTU *Future Strategies - unions working for a fairer Australia*, Part 3 *Unions Reaching Out to New Members*, is the principle background paper for policy proposals under this agenda item. This should be read in conjunction with the additional material set out below.

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***Quick Fact:***

*To build the experience and competencies in new member organising of Australian Lead Organisers, the ACTU is investigating the establishment of a formal Lead Organiser exchange program with appropriate US unions.*

**CONGRESS 2000**

**Resource, Research & Planning for Union Growth**

1. Congress 2000 adopted for the first time a comprehensive policy in relation to organising. The opening to the policy stated:

*Effective organising and campaigning is necessary for union growth.  
There are three essential components:*

- (i) Strong workplace organisation,*
- (ii) Active new member organising, and*
- (iii) Comprehensive campaign capacity.*

2. The policy called upon the ACTU to develop services in order to support union membership growth strategies. These included:
  - the Organising Works traineeship;
  - organising projects with specific affiliates;
  - union education courses and material specifically directed to organising and campaigning methods;
  - advice concerning the reallocation of union resources to organising and campaigning;
  - coordination of combined union organising efforts, particularly those focussed on growth areas of employment; and
  - a continued allocation of substantial resources to The Organising Centre.
3. The policies called upon unions to "*focus attention and action on membership growth*" including:
  - identifying priority targets and develop comprehensive organising campaign plans;
  - reallocating union resources to recruit and organise new members and implement campaigns;
  - creating an organising and campaigning section within the union with a coordinator and specialist staff who focus only on growth through campaign implementation;
  - freeing up resources for growth through modern delivery of union services utilising call or service centres, email and internet; and
  - lifting the status of organising.

### **Organising Focused Approaches to Union Coverage**

4. At Congress 2000 a policy in relation to coverage was adopted in very similar terms to what is proposed at Congress 2003. In addition however, the policy at Congress 2000 made specific reference to:
  - regional union cooperation,
  - casual and labour hire employees,
  - call centre employees, and

- young people.

These issues are addressed below.

## ISSUES FOR POLICY AT CONGRESS 2003

### Resource, Research & Planning for Union Growth

#### ACTU Union Membership Fees Policy

5. The ACTU has not reviewed its policy on union membership fees since 1985 at which time the ACTU recommitted to a policy from the 1973 Congress that affiliates should raise their membership fees to 1% of the All Industries Average Minimum Award Rate.
6. Since that time Australia has undergone enormous economic change which has impacted in unions. Enterprise bargaining has been introduced, de-centralised bargaining has increased the demands on union resources; and changes in the structure of the workforce have affected union membership levels. In response to these challenges unions have become increasingly focused on developing and funding strategies to renew and grow union membership.
7. The benchmark on which the existing ACTU policy is based is obsolete and the circumstances, demands and strategic focus of unions have changed.
8. The Policy paper for this section proposes a policy with the following features:
  - The current benchmark of 1% of the All Industries Average Minimum Award Rate be replaced by a benchmark of 1% of Full-time Adult Weekly Ordinary Time Earnings (AWOTE) which would act as a guide for unions to work toward over time. For example in February 2003 the ABS listed AWOTE as \$899.80 a week. So the indicative target union fee that unions would work toward over time would be \$9:00 a week for full-time workers.
  - Unions should consider establishing lesser rates for part-time or casual employees.
  - Any increases in union fees should be specifically targeted at funding organising campaigns and strategies for union renewal and membership growth - including union education and activist development.
  - Consultation with members should form a critical part of any proposal to increase union fees

9. The policy proposal also recognises that from time to time unions may also need to increase fees to account for increased union operating costs.

## **Specialist Organising Teams**

### **Proposed ACTU Lead Organiser Exchange Program**

10. Lead Organisers can be an important factor when organising in new workplaces and areas and are used extensively in new member organising campaigns in the US.
11. To build the experience and competencies in new member organising of Australian Lead Organisers, the ACTU is investigating the establishment of a formal Lead Organiser exchange program with appropriate US unions.
12. The program would involve a small number of specially selected Australian Organisers and Lead Organisers, who are nominated and sponsored by their union, being placed with an appropriate US union to work on new member organising drives for an extended period of between 3 and 6 months.
13. Australian unions with organisers on the program may be required to host on exchange a union organiser from the US.

## **Innovative Organising Tactics & Union Organisation**

### **Joint Union Approaches to Industry Organising**

14. Establishing cooperative and effective working arrangements between unions is often the best way to achieve outcomes for workers and unions, particularly in new or poorly organised industries.
15. The review of the ACTU Call Central campaign set out below identifies and examines a number of the key elements required in a successful joint union industry campaign.

### **Case Study: The Call Central campaign three years on**

16. At ACTU Congress 2000, the ACTU, ASU, CPSU, CEPU and FSU launched an industry campaign to organise call centres.
17. The industry campaign was needed because:
  - Unions wanted to build a more supportive framework for organising efforts;

- Unions could pool resources and expertise for a sophisticated organising strategy;
- Unions needed to co-operate to resolve demarcation issues internally; and
- 350,000 workers in the industry needed to be exposed to unions.

18. Strategies used included:

- Independent focus groups to identify key organising issues and attitudes to unions.
- Mapping the industry and identifying key target sectors, such as contract call centres that drove workers wages and conditions down.
- Corporate research to identify target sites and analyse corporate leverage points such as key clients, government sponsorship deals, overseas company histories and the like.
- A corporate strategy identified early on through this process was to lift wages and conditions in contract call centres in order to stabilise the out-sourcing of organised work to this unorganised sector.
- "CallCentral" joint union web site and phone referral line, providing free advice for call centre professionals. Cost effective generic campaign stickers, posters, flyers and postcards were developed which were handed out or plastered around areas where call centres existed advertising the web-site and hotline. Over 100 leads were generated in the first year, with calls gradually tapering off, many of which resulted in the organising of key workplaces.
- Innovative organising strategies like home visits and off-site organising were integral to the successful organising of call centres. In particular, community based organising and large scale joint union campaigns proved successful organising tools.
- Community based organising becoming involved in local fund raising and charity activities, sponsoring and supporting local events and community campaigns, lobbying local politicians and councils increased community support for union campaigns.
- Joint union organising campaigns were run in Wollongong and on the Gold Coast with the support of local labour councils.

- Support for organisers through cross union organiser's networks run via the Trades and Labour Councils in every state and a call centre delegate's summit was run by the ACTU in 2002.
- Media exposure ensured that workers knew there was a union for them, that it is active in improving their lot and pressure has been kept up on companies and governments to do the right thing.
- Industry policies enabled the ACTU call centre unions group to take control of the industry agenda by beating employers to a vision of the industry through the production of a White Paper and a Minimum Standards Code for working standards and quality customer service.
- Union demarcation policy and protocols to maximise effective organising were developed.
- Corporate and Industrial campaign strategies included a Call Centre Minimum Standards Code that companies are required to meet the when receiving government financial assistance or work. All State Labour Governments bar NSW and South Australia have signed up to the Code. The first award for contract call centres is due to be achieved this year.

### Regional Organising and Union Cooperation

19. Increasing the access of regional workers to unions is a key union objective.
20. In 2002 union members earned an average \$111 or 16% a week more than non-union workers. For casual, women and part-time workers the gap between union and non-union incomes was even greater. Unions also deliver better outcomes for workers in occupational health and safety and working conditions.
21. While some unions are active in regional communities, too many workers in regional and remote areas are not able to access the benefits of effective union organisation. One reason for this is that acting alone many individual unions find it difficult to resource a union presence in many regional areas. But by working together unions could improve the access of regional workers to unions.
22. Peak union councils at a national, state and regional level have an important role to play in this. But experience shows it is the engagement, commitment and local knowledge of unions on the ground that are key to the success of regional joint union organising projects.
23. ACTU wants to actively encourage more unions to consider the use of joint organising approaches in regional areas.

24. Consistent with the strategic directions outlined in the ACTU unions@work and Future Strategies documents, the ACTU has allocated up to \$50,000 in the 2003/4 financial year to support the start-up of new joint union organising initiatives in regional areas.
25. With the assistance of state and regional labor councils, unions are encouraged to develop proposals for joint union regional organising projects that could be considered for funding by the ACTU.
26. First and foremost, all project proposals should be based on the participation and agreement of relevant unions. Proposals should precisely identify the region, town or area to be targeted under the joint union organising proposal and include the following:
  - a) Research and analysis of proposed joint union organising target including:
    - existing union presence, resources and infrastructure;
    - major industries and employers;
    - employment and population trends;
    - opportunities to grow union membership,
    - potential community and political links and support networks; and
    - why would a joint union organising approach work in the area.
  - b) Clear, agreed and achievable objectives for the initiative including:
    - target levels of membership growth;
    - does the project have the potential to become self funding; and
    - timelines.
  - c) A broad outline of an organising strategy to achieve joint organising objectives including:
    - union co-ordination;
    - any additional research required to establish the feasibility of the project;
    - what existing union resources and support will be dedicated to the project; and
    - key organising resources - will a joint union organiser need to be employed - would an organising works graduate be appropriate.
  - d) Key phases in the proposed regional organising campaign:
    - identifying and analysing specific organising targets;
    - mapping workplaces;
    - identifying key employee issues;
    - making contact with workers;
    - establishing a workplace organising committee;
    - training workplace delegates, etc;

- how a joint union profile will be established in the town or region;
- how will legal/industrial issues be managed; and
- how will community and political organising opportunities be maximised.

e) Specific project plan and budget including:

- staff, financial and other resource requirements;
- vehicles, office space, phones, travel, computer equipment etc;
- campaign materials, legal and industrial assistance;
- what resources participating unions and labour councils will provide; and
- what financial and other support is being requested of the ACTU.

27. Proposals should be submitted to the ACTU Secretary.

28. The ACTU Organising Centre will be available to assist unions and labor councils develop joint regional organising proposals.