

# **Future of Work**

## **Young People and Unions**

### **Background Paper**

### ***ACTU CONGRESS 2003***

#### ***Quick Fact:***

*There are 1.9 million young people aged 15-24 participating in the labour force (roughly 20% of the total labour force).*

*13% of all 15-24 year olds are union members, compared with 24% generally.*

*Yet a key finding of ACTU focus group research was that young workers value the role of unions in negotiating with employers.*

#### **CONGRESS 2000**

1. At Congress 2000 a comprehensive policy in relation to young people and unions was adopted. The policy stated:

*Unions and the ACTU recognise the need for young people to be actively involved in unions and to address their concerns in the workplace.*

2. The policy sought to promote respect and dignity in the workplace for young people by:
  - continuing to campaign for the abolition of age-based rates of pay; and
  - campaigning against harassment and bullying in the workplace which can represent a serious hazard to workers' physical and mental health and safety, particularly young workers.
3. The policy placed a focus on young people and job opportunities and supported:

- the ACTU and unions seeking to ensure greater employment rights for casual employees;
  - encouraging affiliates to include claims for additional apprenticeships and traineeships in collective bargaining;
  - promoting industry policy measures aimed at increasing investment in areas of high unemployment, to provide job opportunities for young people;
  - lobbying government and campaigning for public support to create greater job opportunities for young people, including in the public sector;
  - campaigning with education unions, student groups and other community organisations to defend accessible, quality public education;
  - working with governments and employers to increase the number of apprenticeship and trainee places, including for Indigenous youth;
  - developing specific strategies to increase participation in apprenticeships by young people in the 15-19 age cohort; and
  - ensuring that the VET in schools program is better integrated with mainstream vocational training.
4. Finally, the policy sought to increase involvement of young people in unions by:
- encouraging affiliates to develop specific programs aimed at attracting young people to become union members;
  - encouraging the involvement of young people and their representation in union structures through, among other initiatives:
    - running a National Young Delegates Forum; and
    - the ACTU encouraging affiliates to nominate one representative to attend ACTU Youth Committee meetings; and
  - forming stronger relationships within the community, especially in relation to young peoples' organisations.

## DEVELOPMENTS SINCE CONGRESS 2000

### Attitudes of Young People

5. As part of its overall campaign strategy to increase union membership among young people, focus groups were conducted in 2002 in Brisbane and Melbourne with the support of the QCU. The key findings were:
  - There is a high level of interest among the school-to-work transition groups to know more about unions.
  - Young workers want information about awards, rights and responsibilities at work and anti-discrimination legislation.
  - Young workers believe that the ideal organisation for workplace and social change would incorporate information about work and 'life skills' training; that is, information about budgeting, resumé writing, interview techniques, career advice, job searching and negotiation skills.
  - Young workers value the role of unions in negotiating with employers.
6. The report was presented to the ACTU Youth Forum in 2002 together with an outline of a strategy to create a young workers' network.
7. Worker2Worker, The Young Activist Network was established which represents a single, generic image of unions to young people and consists of the call centre, website presence and labour council and affiliate supported young activist networks.

### Youth Festival Presence

8. In 2003 unions were represented at Big Day Out in every state. The Labor Council of NSW has been attending Big Day Out festivals since 1993 and in recent years has signed up approximately 100 members each year across various industries.
9. Victoria reported over 100 people stopping at the Young Unionist Network (YUN) stall to make enquiries about rights at work and unions.
10. In South Australia U Who?, Network members handed out lollipops and UTLC lanyards as well as the Network's contact details attached to a BDO program to people who agreed to complete a brief survey.

## **ACTU Youth Forum**

11. In 2002 the ACTU Youth Forum was held in Melbourne involving more than 100 young activists from various unions as well as some other young peoples' organisations.

## **ISSUES FOR POLICY AT CONGRESS 2003**

### **Young people - Statistical Overview**

12. There are 1.9 million young people aged 15-24 participating in the labour force (roughly 20% of the total labour force).
13. Around a further 1 million young people are not in the labour force, mostly attending full-time school or tertiary education.
14. 365,100 young people aged 15-19 who are engaged in either tertiary or secondary study are also working (55% of tertiary students and 32.5% of secondary school students).
15. The unemployment rate of those aged 15-19 is around 25%.
16. More than 66% of 15-19 year old workers are presently engaged in casual employment compared with around 25% of the general workforce.
17. 13% of all 15-24 year olds are union members, compared with 24% generally.
18. Over 50% of all 15-19 year olds are employed in Retail Trade, working as Shop Assistants and Sales Persons.
19. Most of the remainder of young employees, work in the areas of Hospitality, Manufacturing, Construction, and Property and Business Services, generally in lower paid occupations.

### **Issues for Young People**

20. The National Training Wage Award has become the minimum wage for young people in many areas and provides the following hourly rates of minimum pay:

Wage Level C

if completed Year 10 and 1 year out of school

\$219 - \$347 per week

If completed Year 10 and 5 or more years out of school  
Or if completed Year 11 and 4 or more years out of school  
Or if completed Year 12 and 3 or more years out of school  
\$347 per week

21. 17% of all calls received by the ACTU call centre concern bullying.
22. From 1988 to 2001 casual employment for workers aged 15 to 19 grew from 38% to 66%.

### **Affiliates and Labour Council Case Studies**

#### ***APESMA's student activities***

23. APESMA offers free student membership to undergraduate students in the areas it represents.
24. The strategy involves;
  - talking to students in lectures,
  - working with student clubs, paying them \$2 for each new student member they recruit,
  - providing some sponsorship for events or publications,
  - attending industry nights and career fairs,
  - placing ads in student publications and websites, and
  - having a students and recent graduate section on the website.
25. Critical to the strategy is converting student membership to full membership. This is made easier with a sliding fee scale.
26. Other unions such as the AEU and ANF have similar programs. In the AEU new teachers are encouraged to become active in union networks and are supported with beginning teacher kits.

#### ***VTHC Young Unionists Network - Working Student Centre***

27. The Working Student Centre proposal for Monash University Clayton campus is a project currently under construction by the Victorian Young Unionists Network. The centre provides a space for unions to recruit and distribute information to graduates as well as act as a site for organising young workers.

28. The Centre will employ a co-ordinator and will be staffed by union trained volunteers. The project will involve organisations including trade unions, the student association, research departments on campus and the Victorian Trades Hall Council. The centre is expected to open in March 2004.

### **Unions in school curriculum**

29. The Labor Council of NSW and affiliates lobbied the NSW Labor Government to include information about unions and contemporary issues around work in cross-curriculum content for schools. Called UNIONTEACH, it includes general issues of interest to the union movement such as ethical practice and social responsibility, globalisation and fair trade.
30. Union representatives on the NSW Board of Studies drafted changes to the syllabus which will be piloted in NSW schools in July 2003 with plans to implement it across NSW in early 2004.
31. As part of the project, the Labor Council of NSW and its affiliates are developing a resource website for teachers who are unionists as a hub for lesson plans, activities and resource information, which should be publicly available in September 2003.
32. The UTLC South Australia is also developing a similar project.