

Future Strategies – Part 2
Unions and The Workplace
Additional Background Material
ACTU CONGRESS 2003

NOTE

The ACTU *Future Strategies - unions working for a fairer Australia*, Part 2 *Unions and the Workplace*, 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.

Quick Fact:

In 2002 women made up 43% of all union members in Australia ... [yet] in 2003 [only] 26% of National Presidents and 11% of National Secretaries are female.

CONGRESS 2000

Union Delegates

1. Congress 2000 adopted the Charter of Workplace Union Delegate Rights. It stated:

Union delegates shall have:

- *the right to be treated fairly and to perform their role as union delegate without any discrimination in their employment;*
- *the right to formal recognition by the employer that endorsed union delegates speak on behalf of union members in the workplace;*

- *the right to bargain collectively on behalf of those they represent;*
 - *the right to consultation, and access to reasonable information about the workplace and the business;*
 - *the right to paid time to represent the interests of members to the employer and industrial tribunals;*
 - *the right to reasonable paid time during normal working hours to consult with union members;*
 - *the right to reasonable paid time off to participate in the operation of the union;*
 - *the right to reasonable paid time off to attend accredited union education;*
 - *the right to address new employees about the benefits of union membership at the time that they enter employment;*
 - *the right to reasonable access to telephone, facsimile, post, photocopying, internet and e-mail facilities for the purpose of carrying out work as a delegate and consulting with workplace colleagues and the union;*
 - *the right to place union information on a notice board in a prominent location in the workplace;*
 - *the right to take reasonable leave to work with the union.*
2. 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.

Women in Representative Union Decision Making Processes

3. At Congress 2000 the ACTU adopted a policy of:
- demonstrating the relevance of unionism to working women,
 - assisting women to organise around issues of concern to them in the workplace,
 - building the organisational strength of women in unions, and
 - developing alliances between unions and women's and community organisations.
4. In relation to representative structures within the union movement the policy:

- established affirmative action in union decision-making processes,
- established 50% women in ACTU governing bodies,
- supported the ACTU Women's Congress in August 2000, and
- sought the monitoring of progress towards gender balance in union structures.

Internal and External Union Communications

5. At Congress 2000 the union movement adopted its first policy in relation to communications. The policy recognised that *"strong, effective communications and campaigning is instrumental in maximising union effectiveness"*.
6. In unions developing an online capacity the policy noted:
 - the new ACTU website, Vunions;
 - an online version of the ACTU National Directory;
 - the maintenance and enhancement of the school resource, Worksite; and
 - the ACTU partnership with Virtual Communities to bring affordable technology to union members.
7. The policy sought to put a new face on the ACTU and unions more generally. As such it endorsed:
 - the use of a new ACTU logo;
 - the use of the slogan "unions work" by affiliates; and
 - the establishment of a proactive network of affiliate union journalists and media.
8. The policy required *"the development of an integrated media strategy designed to enhance public awareness of the benefits of union membership."*
9. Congress also endorsed the development of the ACTU annual awards.

ISSUES FOR POLICY AT CONGRESS 2003

Union Delegates

Research on Delegates and Organisers

10. Drs Peetz and Pocock have been engaged by the ACTU to conduct an analysis of the attitudes and behaviour of organisers and delegates over a three year period.
11. A number of unions have already agreed to participate in this project. The study should provide an invaluable independent insight into the effectiveness of union delegate networks in Australia and how they can be improved. All unions are encouraged to support the project.

Women in Representative Union Decision Making Processes

12. In 2002 women made up 43% of all union members in Australia, up from 41% three years earlier. Women's share of the unionised labour force is now almost directly correlated with female share of the labour force (44%).
13. However in absolute numbers the number of female union members has declined by 14,000 over period 1999-2002, and only 21.5% of all female employees are union members, compared with 24.5% of men. In the private sector, only 15.5% of female workers belong to unions.
14. Women union members enjoy significant benefits over their counterparts outside the union. The ABS data indicates that full-time female union members earn an average \$43 per week more than non-union women, and part-time female union members earn \$131 per week more. While this holds true at all sub-professional occupational groups, it is not true across all industries.
15. The 2000 Congress reaffirmed the ACTU's commitment to affirmative action for women in its decision-making processes. Since Congress 2000 the ACTU Executive has had 50% female membership, and in the period since 2000 changes in leadership mean women now head Labour Councils in four States.
16. However, despite women's growing share of the total union membership, women are often under-represented in union decision-making structures.
17. The 1998 the ACTU sponsored a survey of gender representation of women in unions. The survey measured female participation in union Executive Committees, Councils and Conferences, and gender representation amongst senior elected and appointed officials. It

showed that women comprised 23% of union National Secretaries and 21% of Presidents.

18. A review of these two measures in 2003 shows that 26% of Presidents and 11% of Secretaries are female. This measure does not take account of the size and gender composition of the unions, nor does it recognise different roles and responsibilities in different unions. Nonetheless it highlights the need to identify, analyse and promote activities within unions which will support women's participation in the governance of their organisations.

Internal and External Union Communications

Union Communications Objectives and Strategies

19. Cohesive internal and external union messages and images around industrial campaigns and social issues that:
 - provide a clear understanding of union values and goals to existing members and attract new members,
 - maximise relevance and profile in public debate, build credibility, and
 - influence political and industrial outcomes.
20. To move toward these objectives unions need to build:
 - a shared standard of communication skills and delivery systems among unions;
 - a sophisticated understanding of internal and external communication as an organising, publicity and marketing tool;
 - an understanding of how to apply skills internally and externally, linking the two where possible; and
 - the capacity to reach each segment of our internal and external audiences with cohesive messages.

The Internal/External Approach to Union Communications

21. In all campaigns, unions should actively promote their side of the story to members and the general public. A communications strategy should part of all union campaign planning.

22. Consistent themes and messages create better public understanding and support for union goals, position and values. These messages need to reach members, potential members and people of influence.
23. To be effective, communication must be carried out in two areas:
 - internally - within the union and workplaces; and
 - externally - in the public domain

Communications Officers and Secretaries

24. Unions need a variety of communication skills to support union campaigns. Communications officers and/or union leaders are often required to oversee the twin duties of maintaining a public profile through the media and staying in touch with members.
25. Although a number of unions have dedicated communications officers, in many cases there is a significant capacity for the roles of these officers to be built on a broadened.
26. Some communication officer roles are almost exclusively focused on internal work such as producing journals for an in-house audience. This is an important priority but given enough time and resources to develop and execute a proper media strategy many communications officers may be able to significantly increase the effectiveness of union campaigns.
27. If unions are to build public support and understanding then effective external presentation of union issues is vital.

Using the Media

28. The media can be a powerful organising and publicity tool for unions. It can reinforce union messages simultaneously to an internal and external audience.
29. Media coverage of a workplace issue can be "proof" to members and the public that the issue is important. Workers see their concerns publicly validated by an external, objective source.
30. The media also reaches the general public, including people capable of influencing the policy agenda - such as political and company decision makers.
31. Media strategies need to be carefully thought out and managed particularly in situations of industrial conflict. A well thought out message put forward by the right spokespeople is vital. Paying close attention to the media tactics of your opponent is also important. Be

ready and able to respond as quickly and get the issues back to your agenda.

32. There will also be less combative stories that are on-going in nature, involving issues, for example, such as reasonable hours, maternity leave, privacy, customer service, hygiene standards and quality control, all of which provide grist for the media mill.
33. Everyone in the union chain needs to be able to identify potential stories. Organisers and delegates need to be on the look out for useful case studies. They also need to be in contact with media officers and secretaries to pass on story ideas, develop strategies or just ask for basic help and advice.

What is the Media Looking For?

34. It is important to understand what the media is looking for. A standard check list would include:
 - Impact - does it affect most/ many people? A special group?
 - Timeliness - does it fit with a "hot" issue on everyone's lips?
 - Currency - is it a new piece of information, interesting in itself?
 - Proximity - does it have a strong, local angle?
 - Novelty - is it weird, wacky, wonderful or freaky?
 - Influence - has someone of prominence influenced an issue?
 - Human interest - a personal, emotional story of joy or heartbreak?
 - Conflict and Drama - violent images, confrontation, anger? (a very important dynamic for unions to understand and control)

Getting to Know the Media

35. A well planned, properly thought out communications strategy is vital to creating a sympathetic reporting environment.
36. If unions are taking the time to develop credible, authoritative messages, they also have to establish a solid, working relationship with journalists in order to get the message across.
37. This strategy does not necessarily revolve around media appearances. It can involve occasional background briefings about an issue or an informal, friendly chat.

38. This contact is an important opportunity to educate journalists about union issues, structures and history. Conversely, unions must learn about the processes and needs of the media if they are to use it to advance the union agenda.
39. Use clear, plain English. Explain what you mean or find a simple, direct way to say it.
40. When interviewed by a journalist, don't assume he or she understands your position or the debate. Take the time to talk to reporters to make sure they are thoroughly briefed on your perspective. This might also involve explaining the politics and positioning of your opponents, if it's to your advantage.

The Public Interest Test and Media Training

41. Unless unions use effective language and messages to describe what they are on about in the media, the public can be left feeling like an uninvolved spectator with no stake and therefore no interest in union campaigns.
42. Union action becomes a separate fight between union interests and government or a particular employer, of no relevance to them.
43. Union messages need to be framed broadly. Always ask - why should the general public be interested in the union's story? How can unions relate to them? How can they be included?
44. Officials need to disengage from the union environment and bring the public along using clear language, simple ideas and illustrations.
45. Officials immersed in a campaign need to avoid talking about the process in minute, jargonistic detail - and remember to offer a big picture insight into the quality of patient care, better customer service or smaller class sizes, for example.
46. Union leaders should also encourage workers to speak for themselves. Real people telling real stories from the workplace have much more impact. More often than not, the media prefers to talk first-hand to real workers about their situation.
47. Research conducted in the United States by the SEIU revealed that unions are not perceived as democratic. With union leaders doing the talking, they were seen as the decision-makers rather than the workers. The same survey showed that people had sympathy for workers, but not necessarily for unions. They couldn't see that the workers were the union.

48. Media officers need organisers and other officials to keep track of members who have real potential as spokespeople and get them trained in basic media skills.
49. The media also prefers to illustrate general, big picture stories about trends or test cases with "case studies" about ordinary, average workers. The ACTU is compiling a database of members to help track down appropriate "talent". Unions could also compile and share databases for the same purpose.

Web Sites and Email

50. A well resourced web site can give leverage to union campaigns and provide a vehicle for members and potential members to interact with the union office.
51. Good union web sites should be aimed at three demographics -
 - opinion shapers - media, policymakers, academics;
 - union officials and activists; and
 - members and non-members - rights at work/campaigns/job information.
52. Email can also be an important tool for developing member activism. More people have access to and use email than the web. Unions need to use the web to build and manage email lists, and capture contact information at every opportunity.