

MEMBERSHIP AND SERVICES RESOLUTION ACTU CONGRESS 1997

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Australian union movement faces significant challenges including:

- 1] globalisation and its impact on employment and investment
- 2] structural changes to the workforce
- 3] conservative government attacks
- 4] privatisation and competition policy

1.2 These forces in recent years have been contributing to driving union membership down and the union movement must develop an effective response. In part this requires a more strategic approach, effective use of our resources, a focus on recruitment/retention and building up the level of membership involvement.

1.3 Australian workers are becoming increasingly restive with an anti-union Federal Government, some anti union employers and the increasing gaps between the haves and have-nots. We are the movement that gives those workers voice and organisation to challenge those who say that wages are the cause of unemployment, that our working conditions must decline and that job security is a thing of the past.

1.4 As a movement we need to continue the task of organising more and more workers. We need to listen to their concerns, organise around them, ensure workers' involvement and understanding of the struggle and win better living standards for members and their families.

1.5 In the light of insecurity caused by the forces outlined in 1.1 above, it is fundamental that we articulate a vision for the trade union movement and the positive role that it can play in the lives of Australian workers and their families.

1.6 This vision coupled with a political action plan must be the result of the formulation and implementation of strong independent policies which place the union movement at the centre of community debate on major social and economic issues.

1.7 The challenges of a changing workforce will require innovative organising practices and new bargaining agendas. The confusion created by globalisation and restructuring requires major effort on our part to raise the political consciousness our delegates and activists.

2 INVOLVEMENT

- 2.1 The process of enhancing membership and community involvement includes the following components:
- 1] stronger links with progressive community organisations and community organising programs
 - 2] political education programs for delegates and activists
 - 3] new structures which maximise membership participation
 - 4] links with progressive academics and research organisations
 - 5] understanding the aspirations and needs of young people, women and the precariously employed.
- 2.2 Now more than ever Australian workers need an articulate and organised voice. We need to look to innovative organising strategies that address the challenges raised by the changing workforce, we need to adjust our bargaining agendas to account for the changing needs of workers, we need to forge stronger links with progressive community organisations and we need to orient our services and organisational structures to maximise membership participation, satisfaction and sense of ownership. Ultimately members will measure the success of the union movement's collective efforts by outcomes and results.
- 2.3 This Congress accepts both the challenge and the opportunity. In response we propose a range of initiatives, in part directed at the movement as a whole and in part targeted at the organising and planning processes of individual affiliates.

3 INITIATIVES TO BE TAKEN

- 3.1 The Congress recognises the fundamental challenge presented by current levels of union membership. The ACTU and affiliates commit ourselves collectively to increasing union membership by the year 2000. Congress encourages affiliates to set membership growth targets and carefully monitor performance at all levels of the union. More importantly, the ACTU and affiliates are committed to increasing the numbers of active delegates, without whom recruitment, retention and the operation of unions are impossible.
- 3.2 A committee of senior union officers will take responsibility for co-ordinating the union movement's efforts in the area of achieving increased membership for the period leading to the year 2000 Congress.
- 3.3 In recognition that the level of delegate activism is critical to the success of organising and recruiting, we must recommit to the development of delegates as the cornerstone of our movement. In doing this the strategies to be adopted will include the following :
- 1] a commitment to the development of officials who promote a culture which develops delegates' capabilities
 - 2] the raising of the status of organising roles within union structures

- 3] the establishment and maintenance of comprehensive databases within unions that allow for the identification and tracking of union delegates
- 4] reasserting that a major priority within unions is the training and development of delegates
- 5] the adoption of a political education strategy for delegates across the movement.

3.4 The ACTU will undertake a number of significant initiatives, including:

- 1] Over-sighting the implementation of policy regarding regional recruitment and organising campaigns. The focus of the campaigns to be on regions where we have an established base or where clear potential exists for improvement in union membership
- 2] Undertaking in conjunction with the relevant unions, major industry- specific campaigns in the tourism/hospitality and other sectors to build up numbers of union members in rapidly growing areas of the workforce
- 3] Monitoring existing trials of "shop-front" union facilities and establishing other facilities where appropriate to provide ease of access for potential members to obtain information and join the relevant union
- 4] Continue with the Organising Works initiative. In 1998 the priority areas will be West Australia and South Australia
- 5] Through decisions of the ACTU Executive re-allocate significant amounts of ACTU funds to specific projects aimed at boosting recruitment.
- 6] Develop specific campaigns directed at areas of casual, indigenous and women workers
- 7] Co-ordinate a campaign to achieve leave for trade union training for delegates in all industry sectors
- 8] Maintain and improve the national union Telephone Advice Line and the Labour Information Network
 - 1] Target labour-hire companies for membership drives in campaigns with the relevant unions
 - 2] Continue to develop a package of non-industrial services for use by unions. Emphasis will be placed on those services which members value most highly. (Discount purchasing, discount travel, advisory services)

3.5 General action which will be taken by the ACTU and unions will include:

- 1] Re-examining the amount of resources devoted to organising/recruiting to ensure that sufficient of our effort is devoted to this area to achieve membership growth

- 2] Ensuring that workplace union organisation is effective and that unions provide support for the needs of delegates and activists at that level
- 3] Ensuring that each union takes a strategic approach to its organising and operational work. Promote the exchange of information and experience of unions involved in the development of appropriate strategies in this area
- 4] Convening regular forums of unions at State and Federal levels to discuss and develop their experiences in regard to membership recruitment and retention
- 5] Trialing a package of union specific rewards and incentives to job delegates and active members to recruit new members and recognise their efforts in general industrial work on behalf of the members
- 6] Consideration of the need to commission strategic research concerning successful unionism across a range of industries as a basis for developing strategies to increase membership
- 7] Examining the scope for producing generic information electronically (Internet) and in text form for use by union delegates and activists
- 8] The ACTU will seek agreement with the AFL-CIO and other relevant international peak councils, eg Canada and Britain, to send further working delegations of organisers to work on practical hands-on recruitment and organising campaigns.

3.6 Where union membership in regions or industry areas is low decisions at earlier Congress and Council meetings have provided the opportunity for unions to be able to recruit outside of their area of constitutional coverage. The broad principles which should apply to this area are :

- 1] Applies where membership level is low and existing arrangements offer no realistic prospect of achieving change
- 2] The relevant unions reach agreement on the scope of the proposed initiative or, failing agreement and, consistent with current union rationalisation policy, the proposal is approved by a decision of the ACTU Executive
- 3] Continuation of the initiative is subject to achieving reasonable outcomes within a period of one to two years
- 4] The overall objective is to increase the level of union membership in Australia and the achievement of this objective is the ultimate test of any proposal. Initiatives in this area will only be of value if we avoid outcomes which provoke significant disunity in the union movement
- 5] The details of the application of the above principles to be determined by the ACTU Executive

4 CONCLUSION

4.1 In summary we recognise that current and future union members have the right to expect a union organisation that is effective, inclusive, responsible and

accountable. They are values for which we stand and around which our organising and industrial strategies will, in coming years, take shape.

- 4.2 To that end we call on all affiliates to develop a recruitment and operational strategy and vigorously pursue that approach over the next three years.