

WAGES 1997-2000

RESOLUTION

ACTU CONGRESS 1997

1. OBJECTIVES AND FRAMEWORK

- 1.1 In the context of the current wages system, the objectives of wages policy for the next three years are to:
- 1] achieve increases in real wages for union members;
 - 2] achieve a Living Wage for all workers;
 - 3] strengthen and extend collective bargaining;
 - 4] protect and improve award conditions and the award system;
 - 5] reduce and overcome income inequality, and achieve improvements in equal pay;
 - 6] actively involve and recruit members through wage campaigns;
 - 7] achieve a fairer distribution of economic wealth.
- 1.2 These objectives will be pursued through collective bargaining, the Living Wage, and a continuing commitment to the award system.
- 1.3 Collective bargaining campaigns, involving the widest unity amongst workers in enterprises, corporations, industries and regions will be important in the achievement of the above objectives. Active and effective delegate networks must continue to be developed and the push to individualise employment regulation must be actively opposed and defeated in the workplace. Collectively bargained outcomes will be contained in agreements and awards to which unions are party.
- 1.4 Any changes to the wages system within the next three years must recognise the key role of collective bargaining in determining wage outcomes, in conjunction with relevant and effective award rates of pay.

2. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

- 2.1 Collective bargaining campaigns will be the key method for achieving improvements in wages and employment conditions for union members.
- 2.2 Unions are committed to bargaining on a collective basis because of the inherent inequality in bargaining power between individual employees and their employer. Attempts to undermine collective bargaining and employee entitlements through the use of individual 'agreements' such as AWAs will be opposed.
- 2.3 Collective bargaining may involve enterprise, corporation, industry and/or regional campaigns. An improved capacity to bargain at an industry level must be a feature of any future wages system.

- 2.4 Unions will co-operate to maximise wage outcomes and ensure equity for workers throughout an industry, corporation or region. Combined union campaigns may be co-ordinated through the ACTU or union federations.
- 2.5 Wage claims will be formulated by unions and their members. Attempts by the Reserve Bank or the Government to impose artificial constraints on claims and bargained outcomes will not be accepted.
- 2.6 Bargaining will not be narrowly focussed on wages in return for concessions sought by employers. A wider focus which enables improved entitlements and protections for members, as opposed to trade-offs at the workplace, will continue to be developed.
- 2.7 Collective agreements will be a vehicle for further improvements in equal pay and the removal of discrimination in the workplace. The achievement of equal pay in overawards, equal access for women to training and higher skilled jobs, and equitable treatment of casual and part-time employees will be key objectives in bargaining at the workplace level.
- 2.8 Notwithstanding their ideological support for bargaining, conservative Governments have sought to use bargaining to implement cuts in government funded services, service quality and staff by refusing to fund wage increases. Political campaigns, which complement the industrial campaigns by the unions involved, will be conducted in these circumstances.

3. THE LIVING WAGE

- 3.1 The union movement is opposed to the widening income inequality in the community. Substantial improvements in rates of pay for low paid workers are vital to help overcome social inequality and to ensure a decent minimum standard of living for workers and their families.
- 3.2 The mechanism for pursuing these improvements will be the Living Wage, based upon the following broad principles:
 - 1] the right of workers and their families to a decent standard of living;
 - 2] a fairer and more equitable distribution of economic growth and productivity, which reduces income inequality;
 - 3] reference to benchmarks of income inadequacy in the setting of minimum award rates;
 - 4] reference to bargained/market rates in the setting of minimum award rates;
 - 5] the retention of consistent skill-based classification structures;
 - 6] a fair balancing of work and family responsibilities;

- 7] the improvement of employment and income security;
- 8] the achievement of equal pay.

3.3 The Living Wage will be a central social and industrial objective of the union movement. The Living Wage will be pursued and promoted by:

- 1] National Wage Case applications directed to the establishment by the year 2000 of \$12 per hour for the ordinary hours of work (\$456 per week for 38 hours) as the minimum below which no worker is paid;
- 2] defending and improving the income and employment security provided by awards, particularly for casual and part-time workers;
- 3] collective bargaining through the establishment in agreements of the minimum hourly/weekly rates, and improved income and employment security;
- 4] building political support for the principles and claims, particularly with community, church and political organisations.

4. AWARDS AND THE PROTECTION OF ENTITLEMENTS

4.1 The union movement is committed to the protection of workers through the award system. The maintenance of comprehensive and relevant awards is a central objective, and is vital for workers who cannot achieve improvements through bargaining.

4.2 For workers dependent on award rates the Living Wage will be the key method for pursuing wage increases.

4.3 Award conditions such as shift and leave loadings, overtime and working hours arrangements are the focus of attack by employers and conservative governments, particularly through the allowable matters process. These conditions contribute significantly to take-home pay and the welfare of workers and their families. Award conditions are also important in underpinning the bargaining process, and establishing the basis for the no disadvantage test.

4.4 Award conditions will be protected and improved by unions through industrial campaigns, collective bargaining, the inclusion in awards of bargained/market outcomes wherever possible, the defence of paid rates awards, and arbitration. Legislative change which strengthens awards and the protection they provide for all workers will also be pursued.

4.5 As a mechanism for the protection and improvement of leave and redundancy entitlements, particularly in industries of poor employment and income security, the union movement will investigate the establishment of common trusts/funds into which employers make contributions which finance the entitlements.

5. EQUAL PAY

- 5.1 Continuing improvements in equal pay will be sought through:
- 1] the achievement of the Living Wage in national wage applications;
 - 2] the identification, negotiation and arbitration of claims - particularly in the overaward area and areas of casual and part-time employment;
 - 3] the collective bargaining process, through which the removal of discrimination in pay and employment opportunities in the workplace will be a priority;
 - 4] ensuring that the relativities established in awards in a number of industries with a high proportion of female employment appropriately reflect the skills and responsibilities required.

5.2 The defence of awards is also vital in ensuring that equal pay does not deteriorate.

6. PAY EQUITY FOR YOUNG WORKERS

6.1 The union movement is opposed to the exploitative practice of paying wages on the basis of age rather than skills.

6.2 We oppose junior rates and youth wages and instead support a skills-based wage structure for all workers.

7. INDUSTRIAL LEGISLATION

7.1 The industrial legislation policy deals with the legislative changes relevant to wages policy.