

WOMEN AND UNIONS RESOLUTION ACTU CONGRESS 1997

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At the State and Federal level women=s rights, fundamental human rights are again the first one=s that governments are repealing. The union movement has been presented with a unique opportunity to put forward a platform of action for women as part of the core of it=s activities, which will fill the void left by the government cuts and inaction.
- 1.2 As such where the ACTU is campaigning on broad social issues it should act as a co-ordinator linking unions, community organisations, churches and other relevant parties to promote socially progressive agendas.

2 WOMEN'S INCOME

2.1 EQUAL PAY

Ongoing action is required to ensure that the disparity between men's and women's wages is eliminated. Strategies to be undertaken by the ACTU and Unions may include:

- 1] Unions continuing to investigate pay inequities in their industries, and, where necessary to remedy the situation, the running of equal pay cases in the AIRC;
- 2] The collation by unions and the ACTU of the pay inequities found in individual contracts and Australian Workplace Agreements;
- 3] Close scrutiny by the ACTU of the effects of bargaining on the gap between the wages and benefits of women and men;
- 4] The ACTU and affiliates arguing for the broadest interpretation of allowable matters in awards.
- 5] Detailing the effects of moving from paid rates to minimum rates awards, as the wage differential between women and men in paid rates awards is less than minimum rates.
- 6] Ensuring that wage relativities are maintained by incorporating overaward payments into the relevant wage rates through collective enterprise agreements.
- 7] Pursuing the incorporation of non-wage benefits eg. access to parental leave, bereavement leave, family leave, in the determination of equal pay.

2.2 SUPERANNUATION

The Union movement=s campaigns for superannuation for all workers have increased the retirement savings of women workers. Further action may include:

- 1] The ACTU and Unions embarking on an education campaign to increase the understanding of women about superannuation and retirement income, and the benefits of their industry funds;
- 2] The ACTU and Unions collating data about the effects of the government=s recent changes to superannuation, including RSA=s and increasing the threshold for superannuation contributions to \$900 per month; and

- 3] Incorporating superannuation guarantee minimums in all agreements and awards and ensuring that these awards/agreements also require payment to a fund with union representatives on the Board.

2.3 WAGES STRATEGIES

Strategies to be included in the ACTU overall wages campaign so that women are not disadvantaged include:

- 1] The maintenance and extension of a system of comprehensive awards not simply safety net conditions.
- 2] Protection of paid rates awards.
- 3] Continued claims to improve the baseline of low paid workers including the Living Wage cases.

2.4 BARGAINING

In the bargaining environment there is a need for the ACTU in conjunction with the ACTU Women=s Committee to:

- 1] Collect data, monitor the outcomes from bargaining and develop strategies to minimise disparities between men and women; and
- 2] Develop a comprehensive plan for the implementation across the movement of the recommendations within the Sara Charlesworth Report >Stretching Flexibilities=.

3 WOMEN'S LIVES

3.1 The union movement is committed to women being able to match their choice of working arrangements to their lifestyles and their income needs. Methods which may assist in the choices that can be made by women may include:

- 1] Unions ensuring different forms of employment (full/part-time/casual) deliver certainty about the hours and days women are expected to work; and campaigning for employee driven flexibility in working arrangements within a protective legal framework;
- 2] ACTU and Unions continuing to campaign around the provision of good quality and accessible children's services and elder care. In particular, childcare should be available in geographical areas where needed, meeting the needs of shiftworkers;

Unions examining and arguing for innovative childcare arrangements, particularly for shiftworkers;

- 3] Unions continuing to pursue entitlements which enable workers and their families to live with dignity for example:

- paid parental leave;
- income security during periods of absence;
- family leave conditions beyond current minimum entitlements.

- 4] Education of both male and female members of the entitlements which assist in balancing work and family life eg paid family leave and parental leave. Ensuring in all education campaigns that the needs of NESB workers are accommodated.

3.2 The ACTU and unions must seek to negotiate career structures with accessible and appropriate paid structured training which acknowledges the discontinuous nature of women=s work.

- 3.3 2.3 The ACTU expresses concern about the negative impact on workers and their families resulting from the pressure to work increased hours. This concern will be examined as part of the ACTU=s working hours campaign.

4 PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT

4.1 The union movement recognises that employers prefer precariously employed workers because:

- 1] They are more easily intimidated due to their insecurity of employment;
- 2] Cost less as many of the benefits afforded to permanent employees are not passed on; and
- 3] Are largely un-unionised.

4.2 Immediate and concerted energies must go into strategies to recruit and organise people precariously employed including:

- 1] The mapping on an industry by industry basis of the types of precarious employment, the extent and location, and who is precariously employed, and the collation of research by other organisations. This information can then be presented to unions through seminars around Australia, so they can develop the best strategies for dealing with the issues;
- 2] Continued efforts to organise workers who are precariously employed including innovative organising techniques for example:
 - 1] engaging recruiters to work across all shifts on all days to maximise contact with casual workers;
 - 2] examining membership dues and striking rates which reflect the income levels of casuals/part-time employees;
 - 3] seeking to negotiate agreements with labor hire firms which provide for salary conditions and employment security for employees and which encourage union membership.

A seminar to share unions= positive experiences of organising precarious employees should be held.

- 3] Specific attention must be given to the fact that the majority of those workers precariously employed are women and the tailoring of mechanisms and strategies that recognise this.
- 4] Identifying and eliminating industrial conditions which discriminate against precarious employees including:
 - 1] barriers to salary progression;
 - 2] lower rates of pay;
 - 3] inability to access severance entitlements;
 - 4] non-recognition of service for entitlements, such as long service leave.

4.3 The trend towards the increased casualisation of part-time work must be opposed by the union movement.

- 1] The deregulation of part-time work through the provisions of the Workplace Relations Act will lead to the loss of certainty. As a first step in the strategy to combat this the ACTU will consider an application before the AIRC to raise the discriminatory effects of this shift towards casualisation.

In considering this application the ACTU will canvass the advice and support of organisations such as HREOC.

- 2] Affiliates must ensure in enterprise agreements also that measures are included to combat this casualisation of part-time work and which allow for the conversion of long term casual positions to permanent status.

4.4 The growing incidence of home based work is a major concern to the union movement. The ACTU through affiliates will co-ordinate a strategy to regulate the conditions of employment of these workers and to organise them as part of the union.

5 WOMEN=S PARTICIPATION IN UNIONS

5.1 Unions need to demonstrate a commitment to examining and eliminating barriers to women=s participation in union decision-making forums at all levels. Matters to be examined include:

- 1] the timing of meetings;
- 2] establishing set starting and finishing times of meetings;
- 3] access to care facilities during meetings;
- 4] safe transport, to and from meetings;
- 5] advanced notice of meetings.