

Working Women's Policy

ACTU Congress September 1991

1. Introduction

1.1 The ACTU recognises the important economic contribution made by women to Australia's overall economic performance and consequently the need for a continuation of the trade union movement's commitment to secure equality for women in the workforce and the broader community.

1.2 This must include positive and effective strategies to obtain full equality of opportunity in all areas of employment, training, promotion and career development.

1.3 It is the objective of the Australian trade union movement, via the full implementation of the Working Women's Charter, to eradicate all discrimination and harassment against women workers.

2. Priorities

2.1 Congress reaffirms its commitment to the ACTU Working Women's Charter, all previous Working Women's Policy documents and the Action Program for Women Workers.

2.2 Congress believes that there is a need to continue the following priorities of action:

2.2.1 Promotion and protection of women's right to work in the broadest range of industries and occupations with access to training and skill development opportunities and non-discriminatory career structures;

2.2.2 The achievement of equal remuneration for work of equal value through general wages policy which includes general wage adjustments based on maintenance of living standards, the continuation of award restructuring, ending discrimination in over-award payments and ensuring the benefits of enterprise level wage negotiations are extended to women workers and are not constrained by narrowly focussed definitions of productivity;

2.2.3 Strategies to ensure the needs of workers with family responsibilities including comprehensive maternity protection and parental leave including special family leave are met;

2.2.4 The provision of adequate child care facilities which meet the needs of working parents at reasonable cost;

2.2.5 The adoption by employers of Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action policies and programs, including policies on sexual harassment;

2.2.6 An active campaign and promotion of the increased involvement of women in the trade union movement including special measures to ensure increased participation by women at all levels of newly amalgamated unions.

3. Women's Rights to Work

3.1 Women's Employment - The ACTU recognises:

3.1.1 the right of all women to paid employment and regards women as permanent members of the workforce entitled to all employment benefits and recognition of the skills and contribution of women workers as an essential element in the restructuring of the Australian economy.

3.1.2 that in order for women to participate fully in the workforce there is a need for greater flexibility, in working arrangements within a framework of appropriate award protection, to meet the needs of workers with family responsibilities both men and women.

3.2 The ACTU regards the sex segmentation of the labour market as a major impediment to women achieving equality of employment opportunity and will therefore support programs to increase women's access to the broadest possible range of industries and broadest possible range of jobs in accordance with the following principles:

3.2.1 The need for increased access for girls to maths, sciences and technical education.

3.2.2 The need to provide access for girls and women to all available training opportunities including apprenticeships, traineeships and on the job training.

3.2.3 The need for proper recognition of training experience and skills exercised by women workers.

3.2.4 Support for the implementation of affirmative action programs.

3.2.5. Redesign of jobs in a way which breaks down gender segmentation and provides training and career opportunities for women workers.

3.3 Industry Development Policy - The ACTU believes that all industry policy initiatives should consider the important contribution of women workers and the specific issues relating to women's employment including:

3.3.1 specific measures to include women in industry development mechanisms at the national, industry and workplace levels.

3.3.2 the development of affirmative action initiatives on an industry basis where appropriate.

3.4 Rights at Work - The ACTU supports specific measures to ensure that women are involved in any consultative processes developed at a workplace level to protect workers rights at work including in relation to:

- award restructuring,
- training,
- work design,
- new technology,
- occupational health and safety,
- enterprise bargaining

and that this involvement be monitored and if necessary targets set to increase womens participation.

3.5 Women's particular needs and concerns must be taken into account and catered for in these consultative processes.

4. Equal Remuneration for Work of Equal Value

4.1 The achievement of equal remuneration for work of equal value, remains a key priority of the union movement. In pursuing this objective Congress calls on the ACTU and affiliates to pursue strategies in accordance with the following principles:

4.1.1 All workers should have equal access to all elements of remuneration eg all jobs attracting high levels of remuneration, all employment benefits to be available to part-time workers, equal access to training, skill development opportunities, over-award payments, over-time and superannuation and recognition of interrupted career patterns.

4.1.2 All jobs and the skills required to perform them should be valued in a non-discriminatory way without reference to any bias on the grounds of sex.

4.1.3 Recognising that women workers are generally amongst the lowest paid, priority in wage fixing systems should be accorded to low paid workers and improvements in minimum rates of pay through whatever mechanisms are available but always ensuring the integrity of award rates of pay.

4.1.4 Award conditions and protection should be extended to all workers. Unions shall give priority attention to establishing guaranteed conditions of employment to outworkers, part-time, casual and seasonal workers. Congress adopts the 1990 Guidelines on Part-time Work, Casual Work and Job-Sharing (ACTU booklet D90-90).

4.1.5 Any component of enterprise/industry bargaining within the wages system should only occur within an equitable award framework and should include women workers in consultative processes established, ensure benefits are distributed to all workers equitably and definitions of productivity used should not be narrowly focussed but broad enough to encompass work traditionally performed by women.

4.1.6 In maintaining its commitment to equal pay the ACTU will encourage affiliates to pursue the development of industry specific equal pay strategies for individual industries which will examine and consider:

- the barriers to equal pay in the industry,
- ensuring that minimum rates and work value adjustments establish appropriate and equitable relativities,
- analysis of over-award payments and allowances paid in the industry,
- affirmative action initiatives which include work design, training, child care, family leave issues that impact on women workers in the industry.

4.2 The ACTU recognises equal pay is directly linked to work re-organisation and in negotiations relating to job and work redesign attention should be given by affiliates to:

- making the achievement of equal pay a central objective of such negotiations,
- ensuring job and work re-design is clearly integrated into an award framework that develops women's skills and provides them with access to further training and promotion ie career paths,
- decreasing gender segmentation in the workforce,
- identifying and removing any sex bias in job evaluation systems and recognition of skills,
- identifying and establishing infrastructure mechanisms that contribute to meaningful job and work re-organisation such as child care,
- ensuring that participative work practices which include women workers are enshrined in any job or work re-organisation.

5. The Establishment of Comprehensive Maternity, Parental and Family Leave

5.1 The ACTU supports the establishment of comprehensive maternity, paternity, parental and family leave. In pursuing this objective Congress believes the following principles should apply:

- All workers with family responsibilities should be entitled to paid or unpaid leave entitlements in accordance with international standards, including leave for caring for children and other dependants.
- Paid maternity leave for all women workers should be recognised as a basic necessity for achieving equality for women in the workforce with responsibility for such leave recognised as a social responsibility of the whole community rather than an individual and private responsibility.

6. Child Care

6.1 The ACTU supports the pursuit of adequate numbers of high quality child care facilities which meet the needs of working parents at reasonable cost.

6.2 In pursuing this objective Congress supports the following principles:

- Expansion of the provision of a wide range of government-funded child care services to meet demand.
- Priority of services to those most in need.
- Recognition of child care as a key component in equal employment opportunity for women, and as an industrial issue.
- The necessity for proper award wages and conditions including access to training and career paths for all workers in the child care industry.

7. Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Policies and Programs Including Policies Designed to Combat Sexual Harassment.

7.1 In pursuing equal employment and affirmative action policies and programs Congress supports the following principles:

7.1.1 all workers are entitled to equal employment opportunity and in particular there should be no discrimination in wages and employment on the basis of sex, race, religion, disability, sexual preference, pregnancy, marital status, or family responsibilities.

7.1.2 That in developing equal employment policies and programs the special needs of particular groups of women will be taken into account:

- aboriginal women,
- women from non-english speaking backgrounds,
- low income women,
- women with disabilities,
- rural and isolated women,
- young women,

as well as recognising the special needs of all workers in these categories and in addition addressing the needs of all workers with family responsibilities.

7.13 That all workers have the right to work in an environment free from sexual harassment and that such activity in any workplace should not be tolerated as sexual harassment is a denial of the right to equal employment opportunity.

7.2 Congress condemns in the strongest terms the recent trends in service industries such as retail, hairdressing and hospitality to promote sales and services through the employment of topless and scantily clad staff. Such developments encourage the perpetuation of sexist attitudes towards women. Unions taking action against employers who engage in such activities will receive the support of the entire trade union movement.

8. Increased Involvement of Women in the Trade Union Movement

8.1 Congress reiterates the importance of increased involvement of women in the trade union movement. In pursuing this objective Congress believes the following principles should be followed:

- The need for unions to consider adopting special measures directed towards women members eg the appointment of women's officers, establishment of women's committees, special publications and conferences directed to women members.
- The importance of trade union training for women trade union members.
- The implementation by unions of affirmative action strategies designed to increase women's participation at all levels of union structures.

- The implementation by unions of affirmative action strategies for their employees