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Jobs & the Economy: The Union Agenda for Fairness and Prosperity

Australian unions have been central to the advancement of progressive economic and social policy in the past. Unions have fought for, and secured, vital elements of the social wage, like pensions, superannuation, Medicare, and income for the unemployed.

Australian unions have always had a vision for a fair and prosperous Australia that starts with rights at work, and looks outward beyond the workplace. Congress recognises the challenges and opportunities that Australia faces over the coming decades and commits to the development a new union agenda for the future of the Australian economy and the Australian workforce.

Background

- While the Australian economy has outperformed most other advanced economies since the global financial crisis (with low public sector debt, a low unemployment rate and solid real growth in average wages) the benefits of prosperity have not been shared broadly enough.
- Key areas of the economy are under pressure – the multi-speed economy is real. Some sectors, particularly trade-exposed industries such as manufacturing, finance, and tourism, are struggling with the dramatic and sustained appreciation in the exchange rate. Jobs have been lost and more are under threat. Australia needs a comprehensive plan for sustaining employment and economic development beyond the mining boom.
- Secure jobs are becoming rarer, with precarious work on the rise. Income, job and working time insecurity have profound negative implications for workers, their families, and their communities.
- Inequality has risen, putting at risk the long-standing norm that Australian should remain a relatively egalitarian place.
- A form of corporate inequality has developed. A greater share of corporate profits are being taken by a handful of the largest companies while many smaller enterprises struggle. An enormous share of national wealth is being captured by

a handful of mega-rich individuals who also seek to dominate policy making and public debate.

- Public services are under threat, with the rise of a radical 'small government' ideology threatening the health, education, and other vital community services that Australians take for granted.
- There has been a decade long under-investment in infrastructure and skills, leaving Australia under-equipped to grow and compete in the Asian Century.

Principles & Issues

Unions seek a strong Australia that is fair and prosperous, with secure employment for all who want it, social assistance for all who need it, and truly equal opportunities for all. Unions seek dialogue with political parties, civil society, and business leaders on this agenda.

Consistent with the policies adopted at the Congress the ACTU will urgently convene experts from across Australian unions to develop a plan to make sure workers and their families, no matter where they live or work, benefit from a prosperous economy. The union agenda for the Australian economy will be centred on the following issues.

- **Jobs & Employment:** Ensuring that Government policy does everything possible to create and sustain good jobs;
- **Productivity:** The human and physical capital necessary to secure sustainable productivity growth that lifts real wages and workers' living standards;
- **Public Services:** Securing adequate and sustainable revenue to provide high-quality public services; and a response to the ideological attacks on public services.
- **Macroeconomic Policy:** The appropriate framework for managing macroeconomic policy, (including the inflation target, fiscal rules, and exchange rate policy) and the possible role for policies such as the creation of a sovereign wealth fund.
- **The Mining Boom:** The best ways to ensure that the benefits of the current mining boom are used to benefit all Australians, including future generations of Australians;
- **Inequality:** Rising inequality, especially inequality of earned income, and the need for intergenerational equity;
- **Personal Tax & Transfers:** An equitable personal tax that will help promote social inclusion and jobs and a welfare system that does not create or entrench poverty; and

- **The Social Wage:** Ensuring that the components of Australia's social wage keep pace with the evolving needs of the needs of the community;
- **Corporate Tax:** A corporate tax system that promotes productive investment, infrastructure development and employment, and ensures that taxes fall most heavily on sectors and companies extracting economic rents.

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