

40th anniversary of ACTU decision to back construction unions campaign for national superannuation scheme

Today marks 40 years since the ACTU's historic decision to endorse the campaign of the Building Workers' Industrial Union (BWIU) to establish a national superannuation scheme in the Australian building industry, a campaign that improved the nation forever.

On 28 February 1984, the ACTU and building unions endorsed the visionary plan of the BWIU to campaign to create a superannuation scheme where employer contributions were paid to all building workers, preserved until retirement, responsibly invested to deliver the best possible returns for members while improving their working lives, and where lump sums were paid to workers and their families if the worker became permanently disabled or died prior to retirement.

Superannuation was once the privilege of few, applying to less than 1 in 4 women and blue-collar workers.

The introduction of superannuation in the building industry, was a critical step along the way for the introduction of universal superannuation legislation eight years later by the Hawke and Keating Labor Governments.

However, without the foresight and leadership of unionists like Bill Kelty, Mavis Robertson, Garry Weaven and Tom McDonald Australia would not have the world-class retirement income system we enjoy today.

Today, the ACTU pays tribute to these union pioneers and architects of industry superannuation but especially the tens of thousands of building workers who campaigned for superannuation and in so doing so, created the beachhead that turned super into a universal right for all working Australians.

Quotes attributable to ACTU assistant secretary Joseph Mitchell:

"Today almost every worker has the right to superannuation but that right would not exist without the workers who took the first step to fight for a fairer retirement, and the leaders who built industry superannuation like Bill Kelty, Garry Weaven, Mavis Robertson, and Tom McDonald."

"The pioneering work of building unions that led to the creation of Cbus and other industry funds paved the way for universal superannuation across Australia which is now enjoyed by millions of workers. The claim for industry funds led to the best performing and best governed funds in the country since their inception.

"While the Coalition are intent on draining workers' superannuation accounts to pay for their own policy failings, workers are calling for an expansion and increase in superannuation to ensure it is truly universal and adequate. Workers want equal retirement outcomes for women, superannuation preserved until retirement, paid to every worker and paid on every dollar earned.

"As we have for over 40 years, the ACTU and Australian unions will continue to defend and advance the fundamental right of all workers to retire in dignity."

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