

ACTU Indigenous Conference 2008

AEU SA Offices Parkside Adelaide South Australia

DAY 1

19 May 2008

Session One Welcome to Country

ACTU Indigenous Committee Chair Darcel Russell welcomed delegates to the ACTU Indigenous Conference 2008.

Aunty Josie Agius, Elder of the Kurna people, welcomed delegates to the land of the Kurna people. Aunty Josie emphasized the importance of education, and wished the delegates well in their deliberations.

Session Two Introductory Addresses

Janet Giles, Secretary SA Unions, welcomed delegates to South Australia. Janet noted it was fitting that the Conference was meeting at the AEU SA given the AEU SA work towards Reconciliation – publishing a Reconciliation Statement, holding annual Reconciliation Conferences, and creating an Aboriginal Members Consultative Committee.

Janet noted that SA Unions had supported a bus of Indigenous people to travel to Sorry Day at Parliament House, Canberra.

Sharan Burrow, ACTU President, thanked:

- Aunty Josie Agius for the Welcome to the Country of the Kurna people.
- Janet Giles for welcoming the delegates to SA.
- Jack Major, AEU SA Secretary, for hosting the Conference, and AEU SA staff members, Nola, Karen and Dean for their assistance to the Conference.
- The Conference sponsors – the major sponsor MembersEquity Bank; and sponsors Member Connect, Discount New Cars and Virtual Communities.

Sharan noted that we are on the threshold of something big, bigger than expected, and spoke of Sorry Day as a day that Australia had come of age, heralding a shared future.

In relation to the Northern Territory Intervention, it was noted:

- in Darwin this year on May Day, people had expressed various views
- Unions do not have the answers
- As the Review of the Intervention is about to commence we need to listen to the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders.

In relation to CDEP, it was noted:

- Unions do have the right to say something more strongly about CDEP, because employment is a focus.
- We welcome the Labor Government decision to reinstate CDEP as an interim measure, but we also recognize the problems inherent with the CDEP scheme.

- Unions need to advocate for decent jobs, for public sector jobs, particularly those partially funded by CDEP, to be paid properly.

Sharan stated that the rights of workers is a matter at the heart of Unions, and thanked delegates for the work they did during the YRAW campaign.

It was noted that Unions need to use our bargaining power to create decent jobs:

- Real jobs and working opportunities for Indigenous Australians
- Underpinned by skills
- With ongoing support through VET
- Need to recruit workers and support their aspirations

The Rudd Government had announced a Review of Indigenous employment. This is a core business for Unions, we will need to have the loudest voice on what is required for job readiness and employment.

Sharan stated that having listened to the views put to them, the ACTU Officers announce that the ACTU will employ a National Indigenous Officer, initially for a period of 12 months and by secondment. That person will be part and parcel of the ACTU team, and expected to work across the ACTU to highlight Indigenous issues.

Sharan concluded by stating that 2008 is the year to make our voices heard. We need to grow union membership, Indigenous union membership, and grow secure decent jobs for Indigenous Australians.

Sharon Clair, Vice President, Maori, of New Zealand Council of Trade Unions was welcomed and invited to give the Keynote Address.

Session Three Key Note Address - Sharon Clair, Vice President Maori of New Zealand Council of Trade Unions

Sharon Clair noted that because of the Apology the gaze of the world is on Australia. Sharon noted it was an honour and pleasure to convey greetings from NZCTU.

In her Address Sharon noted:

- The history of Maori survival
- Survival was the motivator
- Last year the Maori economy contributed \$9b to the New Zealand economy, \$4b from Maori labour
- Beyond surviving, there is development
 - Capability, capacity and governance
 - The role of the NZCTU in driving the development phase
 - Creating space for Maori entrepreneurs
- NZCTU has 39 Affiliates, 400,000 members, 60,000 Maori (maybe higher because not all affiliates identify ethnicity)
- About the relationship, relationship agreements
- NZCTU has elected Maori officers, Elders
- NZCTU has a commitment to Maori development
- Biggest challenge is resourcing
- NZ unemployment rate is 3.4%, Maori unemployment rate is 7.7%
- Maori employment is concentrated in services, goods producing and primary industries, therefore vulnerable to cyclical change, lower paid and lower skilled
- Maori populations are concentrated in the regions of highest unemployment.

- What is the Union movement doing?
 - Maori population is young so need a vision of the future labour market and workforce
 - Educate young, need:
 - Highly productive jobs
 - Add value jobs
 - Decent wages and conditions
 - To consistently strive to develop workforce
- Inform youth about globalization, skills shortages, immigration – do not want Maori to pay the price of the immigration answer to the skills shortage.
- Support for completion of skills training because completion is a problem.
- Inform youth about climate change
- Increase minimum wage to 2/3rds average wage
- Promote collective bargaining
- Legislation to provide for fairness at work
- Indigenous employment strategy
- Lobby, be visible
- Message of survival and strength.

Session Four Tanya Hosch Towards a new National Representative Body

Tanya Hosch addressed the Conference delegates on the issue of a National Representative Body. Some of the questions posed included: If we agree on the need for a body, have to decide what role and function? Must be accountable, if so measured against what? Is there a role for the union movement to support Indigenous people in achieving the best result? The Conference discussed various models of representation. Tanya noted that there will be a paper and a Summit.

Session Five Address by Representative of Conference major Sponsor MembersEquity Bank

Brian Hession, SA representative of MembersEquity Bank, addressed the Conference on the benefits for Union members and Industry Super Fund members from using the services provided by MembersEquity Bank, Member Connect, Discount New Cars and Virtual Communities. The Conference thanked the Sponsors for their support of the Conference.

Session Six Group Discussion: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats: What Unions are doing to organise Indigenous Workers

The Conference broke into groups to discuss the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of arising from what Unions are doing to organise Indigenous Workers.

Session Seven Successful Union Strategies for Community Based organising

Kevin Tory spoke of the history of Indigenous peoples' relationships with unions, culminating in the Indigenous activity in the YRAW campaign.

Adam Kerlake spoke of the lessons from the YRAW targeted seat campaign:

- the importance of engaging and educating the community about the need to get involved, if interested in the labour market, and wages and conditions,
- only way to achieve change is if the local community gets together, community involvement in committees
- structures, education and mobilisation
- union movement needs to provide support of how to run a political campaign
- need to share political campaign strategies and skills
- how to translate from community to community
- how to share skills so Indigenous people can achieve senior positions
- how to develop the narrative / the story
- have the debate about the issues, the conversation with people, particularly if there are differences of opinion.

Charline Emzin Boyd addressed key factors in successful campaigns:

- flyers
- days spent in communities signing people up to committees
- attending conferences in the area
- correspondence to Land Councils, including thank you letters post election
- visits to missions and towns
- spreading the word through connectedness

Mal Cochrane addressed other key factors:

- identifying population numbers
- visibility – T-shirts, etc.
- resourcing

DAY TWO 20 May 2008

Session Eight Feedback from Group Discussions on Day One

Group One (Terry)

Strengths:

- correspondence re CDEP
- some proactive in area of climate change
- NTEU 10 Point Plan includes if a Branch does not look after the Indigenous members then the Division can intervene, if that Division does not intervene, the National Office can intervene to seek training of staff.
- Knowledge and experience, particularly in collective bargaining
- Can offer security, building of relationships with Indigenous workers

Weaknesses:

- In some areas union rep is rarely seen
- Not enough Union representative visits to remote communities and Islands

Opportunities

- To create generational change and teach young workers before we retire
- To have a membership drive
- Obtain training for young Indigenous workers to fill skill shortages
- Recruitment through re-organising CDEP, move CDEP workers into real jobs

- Opportunity to use some of the windfall from the mining boom to create training and job opportunities
- To access education through all levels
- ACTU to lobby Government to reinstate lost funding
- ACTU to ensure Affiliates hold members accountable for actions on Indigenous lands

- To seek that all working on NT Intervention are union members

Threats

- ACTU needs to be more consistent
- No added funding in Budget
- Right of entry requirements

Group 2 (Adam)

Strengths

- Links to community
- Networks
- Culture, and drive to get cultural change
- Indigenous people with supportive unions
- People power

Weaknesses

- Employer lack of awareness of culture
- Lack of connectedness
- Lack of training
- Lack of indigenous workers working in Indigenous communities
- Some unions have no Indigenous involvement or strategy

Opportunities

- To use YouTube and MySpace to connect with young people
- Inclusion of Indigenous members
- Workplace visits to meet members
- Communication strategy about what unions have done for members
- Negotiate partnerships with Government

Threats

- Too many loopholes in land use agreements

Group 3 (Charline)

Strengths

- Unions that take up fight, supported by Executives
- Trade union training for Indigenous members
- Indigenous members encouraging recruitment and knowledge sharing
- Mentoring
- Email lists
- Work shadowing, capacity building
- Cultural days
- Indigenous Organisers

Weaknesses

- Need to come together
- Rep at work seen as troublemaker
- Lack of list of identified Indigenous members
- Lack of knowledge of union role

- Remoteness, limited access to union people
- Union general staff lacking cultural awareness
- Cultural days not consistent

Opportunities

- Information kit on unions, services, union coverage
- Change attitudes about image of unions
- Make cultural days consistently applied
- Recruitment
- Employment creation
- Identified positions
- Up-skilling of Indigenous workers
- Building self confidence through training

Threats

- Intimidating behaviour

- Removing support for communities

Group 4 (Kara) (additional points to those raised by other groups)

Strengths

- YRAW campaign engaged many Indigenous workers

Threats

- If don't continue the YRAW campaign
- If Indigenous Officer leaves structures created may fall down

Opportunities

- Continue the YRAW campaign

Session Nine Tracker Tilmouth and Michael O'Connor – Indigenous Development and Employment Opportunities arising from Climate Change

Michael O'Connor, National secretary of the CFMEU FFPD and Tracker Tilmouth discussed the development and employment creation opportunities arising from climate change. Key lessons:

- Analyse major changes in how the economy is to operate
- Seize the opportunities
- Get in on the ground floor and help to shape it.
- Analyse how to develop the economic opportunities to sustain real jobs
- Develop a mosaic of land uses
- Indigenous communities working with Unions
- Unions to promote sustainable Indigenous employment
- Need proper wages and conditions for CDEP work

Session Ten Panel Session Union and industry programs increasing Indigenous Employment

Sharon Giibbard, Plumbing Commission Victoria, Christian Gaylard ETU Southern States, and Rohan Tobler Redfern-Waterloo Authority addressed the Conference on Indigenous employment programmes.

Key points from the Plumbing and Electrical Apprentices Program in Victoria:

- Genesis a conversation with communities about what they needed
- Indigenous youth from across Australia come to Melbourne for training and industrial experience facilitated by the ETU and CEPU
- Indigenous mentor works with the apprentices
- Ongoing relationship with community – each year apprentices are sent home for visits.
- Using STEP funding but 12 month funding doesn't provide sufficient funds to employ a mentor for four years
- Bring others down to meet the group so others are inspired to join in.
- ETU approaches employers, with whom they bargain, to employ Indigenous apprentices
- Every employer who took on an apprentice last year took on another this year.

- All did pre-apprenticeship aptitude test, good indicator of chance of success, union runs the test, given all the time they need to complete, if need extra tuition provided by union
- Engage the apprentices in sport, union considers this to be vitally important because it allows extra mentoring opportunities
- Can ring Christian or Dean 24/7
- Need to befriend the apprentices to provide all the support needed.
- Looking to start a fund to support programmes in other unions

Key points from Redfern Waterloo Authority programme

- Recruit, train, mentor, befriend
- The organizing strategies / structures on which the programme is based:
 - Community: community based, entry level training, close connections, well respected Elder from industry
 - Union: Memorandum of Understanding, contact with organizers for leverage and contact with business
 - Industry: large corporation good will - helps them tender on contracts; small companies - skill shortage solutions from Group Training Companies
 - Government: Aboriginal employment targets on all government contracts, training funds - on basis of \$1m = 6 positions Kevin Rudd's \$40b Infrastructure Fund = 240,000 jobs under the programme.
- RWA Indigenous Employment model assists head contractors and sub contractors by approving the plan, mentoring and co-ordinating
- Course of training leads to industry entry white card, First Aid / Elevated Platform / Forklift license
- When interview determine whether at stage of life when want to make a change
- About training with an outcome - straight out to work
- Mentoring program - once a week visit, identify problems, gain confidence
- 75% complete, 75% gain full time employment
- Greater than 50% of positions are Apprenticeships and Traineeships
- Over last two years 258 positions, 133 filled further 125 to be filled over next year
- Can be adapted to any community and industry

Session Eleven Draft Charter of Indigenous Employment Rights and Response to ACTU Future Strategies

Darcel Russell and Kara Touchie spoke to the documents. Key points:

- Apology to the Stolen Generations provides optimism for the future
- Conference is timely
- ACTU Officers announcement creates a new path forward
- Role for unions to recruit and create employment
- Need to reduce the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- Less Indigenous workers join unions, but those who do are more active
- Most who are not members say its because they have not been asked
- Raises the question of our role
- Draft Charter for consultation within unions, communities and workplaces
 - Good organizing tool
- Response to ACTU Future Strategies document is a detailed response
- Outlines how Indigenous union members can fit into ACTU Strategy
- For consultation and feedback

ACTU Committee

- Members are representatives of National Unions
- Role is to implement policy and advise Executive
- Executive receives reports on Committee work

ACTU

- ACTU Executive includes an Affirmative Action Indigenous Member
- To create relationship between Committee and the ACTU Executive, the Committee Chairperson is the Affirmative Action Indigenous Executive member
- Indigenous Caucus at ACTU Congress elects Executive member and proxy – by and from Caucus
- Casual vacancies between Congresses Committee members may also vote
- ACTU Congress 2009, urge Unions to send Indigenous delegates
 - Review policy for Congress 2009
- If have material for Indigenous page on ACTU website (found under Union to Union) please send to ACTU

Session Twelve What can the ACTU do, what can my Union do, and what can I do to increase recruitment and employment of Indigenous workers?

Group 1

ACTU

- More information on what unions are about, values

My Union

- More visits to workplaces

Me

- Empowered to play a more active role

Group 2

ACTU

- Develop own logo
- Media strategy targeted at youth to improve promotion of how to join
- Promote Cultural Awareness / Competency
- Seek policy changes from government in matters affecting Indigenous workers

My Union

- Promote Indigenous Union links
- Support and promote Aboriginal delegates and role
- Consider employing Indigenous organiser
- Aboriginal delegates at all workplaces
- Cultural awareness raising for Industrial Officers

Me

- Seek paid time for Indigenous Forums

Group 3

ACTU

- Run communication campaign aimed at recruiting Indigenous workers

My Union

- Mapping process
- Employ Indigenous officer
- Network of members National / State / Regional
- Work towards increased employment of Indigenous workers in the public service

Me

- Promote the Union in our workplaces and communities / raise union profile

Group 4

ACTU

- Increase community awareness of role of unions
- Build positive attitude to unions
- Indigenous information kit – what unions do, what unions stand for, profile and role of each union
- Trade union training for Indigenous members
- Cultural competency training

My Union

- Develop local network, supporting network
- Shadowing programme
- Target career day expos
- Cultural competency training

Group 5

ACTU

- Assist unions identify Indigenous members

My Union

- Include self identification question on membership form
- Play more active role in NT
- Membership information and training
- Transfer conditions into other agreements

Group 6

ACTU

- Work with affiliates to ensure union members are responsible on Indigenous lands
- Encourage unions to bargain for Indigenous employment
- Get information out on PML so can be part of campaign

- Support Super campaign
- Reflect community ideas in campaigns
- Review gap with Indigenous workers and seek funds to narrow

My Union

- Submissions to Ministers / Senate / HofR
- Work on Super campaign
- Include Indigenous employment clauses in EBAs

Me

- Recruit like hell
- Educate those who will take my place

Group 7

ACTU

- Pursue fair work fair wages campaign
- Develop simple plain worded document on the benefits of union membership for non-members
- Lobby Government re ATSI employment across all sectors, and in leadership roles
- ECC to do cultural competency training for non-Indigenous unionists

My Union

- Improve education outcomes for Indigenous students
- Continue incentive packages
- Continue to build membership

Me

- Build membership by informing others
- Use radio opportunities for promotion of union membership
- Share with my network and my union my concerns about students in remote areas missing out on education
- Spread the Draft Charter of Indigenous Employment Rights across my network

Session Thirteen Plenary Session and Conference Resolutions

Resolutions

CDEP

In regard to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs' proposal for the re-introduction of CDEP, the ACTU Indigenous Conference calls on the Minister to conduct, within 3 months, a comprehensive regional economic assessment programme that will identify business and service opportunities for each of the communities concerned, with the purpose of identifying real job opportunities so that people can move from CDEP to real jobs. Further, the conference calls on the Rudd government to seriously consider, as an act of wage justice, the back-pay of superannuation and long-service leave entitlements to members of the Aboriginal community who have been employed on CDEP for the last 15 years.

The ACTU Indigenous Conference calls on the ACTU to be guarded in its support for the re-introduction of CDEP without real wage outcomes, job opportunities and the payment of appropriate entitlements, including superannuation, as without these conditions the union movement would consider CDEP to be racially discriminatory.

Moved Kara Touchie, QCU/CPSU
Seconded Darcel Russell, AEU
CARRIED

Aboriginal Training and Employment Outcomes

This Conference calls on all unions to share information about successful models for Indigenous employment in the public and private sectors and use these successful models as a basis for implementation of Indigenous employment strategies in their industries. In particular, the conference commends the work of the ETU and CEPU in Victoria and the CFMEU and Redfern Waterloo Authority in Sydney as exemplary models for Indigenous employment and pre-employment training and encourages appropriate affiliates to share these models with a view to implementing these across Australia. Further to this, the ACTU and affiliates should lobby Governments to introduce a 5 year funding cycle for these and similar programmes in order to provide certainty and enable an increase in outcomes.

Moved – Robert Smith CPSU
Seconded – Lara Watson, CFMEU
CARRIED

National Representative Body

The Conference calls on the ACTU Indigenous Committee to be involved in discussions on the National Indigenous Representative body. Further to this, the ACTU should establish a process to ensure that Indigenous unionists are both informed and able to have input into these discussions and any eventual decisions about the nature and shape of the body.

Moved Vicki Hault (CPSU)
Seconded Diat Callope (IEU)
CARRIED

Motion on Indigenous Education

The ACTU Indigenous Conference calls on the ACTU Executive to note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have an increasingly younger profile. Approximately 45% are under 15 years of age (yoa) and around 65% are under 25 yoa and they are overrepresented in unemployment.

There are equity issues that arise and opportunities for Australia in this circumstance. Australia has a skill shortage and Indigenous youth are in a perfect position to solve this issue, if certain responsibilities are implemented nationwide.

Indigenous outcomes fall short of the average. The ACTU Indigenous Conference calls on the Federal Labor Government to:

- Realistically support the programs that train Indigenous teachers and fund these programs in such a manner that they support Indigenous tertiary students needs;
- Revise the means testing of Abstudy from the age of 25 back to 18 to recognise the higher number of independent young adults in Indigenous communities;
- Reintroduce local Abstudy offices with identified positions to reflect the understandings and support required in regional locations;

- Implement the Aboriginal Education Policy nationwide to support Indigenous children in school and share Indigenous perspectives with all Australian learners;
- Ensure core semester units on issues in Indigenous education are included for all pre-service teachers, and is required training for all in-service practicing teachers who have not undertaken this.

Moved Terry Mason, NTEU
 Seconded Leona Oliver, NTEU
 CARRIED

Motion on Indigenous Superannuation

The ACTU Indigenous Conference calls on the ACTU Executive to note the requirement for a change to the statutory retirement age for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The median and of death/mortality rates for Indigenous Australians is approximately 17 years lower than that of non-Indigenous Australians (ABS 2008). In light of these statistical rates of mortality, it is proposed that the statutory retirement age for Indigenous Australians be lowered from the current age of 65 years of age to 55 years of age.

The Conference calls on the ACTU Executive to note the recommendations from the 2020 Summit, in particular the support of Indigenous delegates to lower the statutory retirement age for Indigenous Australians.

The National Tertiary Education Unions (NTEU) discussion paper to the 2020 Summit detailed that Indigenous life expectancy at birth for the period 1996-2001 were estimated to be 59.4 years for males and 64.8 years for females (ABS 2008).

As a matter of urgency, consideration needs to be given by the Federal Labor Government to reduce the statutory retirement age to 55 years of age and provide to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers access to superannuation and other Government retirement benefits.

Moved Leona Oliver, NTEU
 Seconded Terry Mason, NTEU
 CARRIED

Cross- Cultural Awareness

That the Indigenous Committee work with the ACTU Education and Campaigns Centre (ECC) to develop and implement a cultural competency training programme for union officials. The programme must be localised.

Further that the Committee works with the ECC to review the cultural component of the Organising Works programme.

Moved Lara Watson (CFMEU)
 Seconded Kara Touchie (QCU)
 CARRIED