

Contributed Article

Leadership Representativeness in the Australian Union Movement*

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This paper explores the dimensions of political and personal representativeness in the context of Australian unionism in the period since World War Two. The first part of the article is dedicated to an operationalisation of these two concepts within trade unions, paying particular attention to the social origin of union leaders and their democratic accountability. The two dimensions of representativeness generate a two-by-two matrix which allows us to identify four types of union. The bulk of the article is taken up by an assessment of representativeness in Australian unions in relation to this matrix. The article concludes with some consideration of the relationship between the two different dimensions of representativeness, and the implications of this relationship for prospects for union revival.

Introduction

The issue of representation has a long history in the literature of political science.¹ While there are many aspects of representation that have been canvassed in this literature, two themes recur. The first is *personal representativeness*: the degree to which the personal characteristics (socio-economic, demographic) of the politician or leader reflect those of the his or her constituency. Personal representativeness, or what Birch (1971) refers to as 'microcosmic representativeness', occurs where the representative is 'in

* The ideas in this article have been formed during discussions with a range of friends and colleagues since 1998. The single most important contribution was by Jeff Sparrow who conducted the interviews which are referred to in this article and who also gave extremely useful feedback on earlier drafts. Other critical input has come from Mick Armstrong, Diane Fieldes, Rick Kuhn, Tess Lee-Ack, Georgina Murray, Tom O'Lincoln and Liz Ross. I would also like to thank the *Australian Bulletin of Labour* referees for their comments which helped to sharpen the argument considerably. None of these, however, bears any responsibility for the final content. Finally, the article would not have been possible without the financial assistance of The University of Queensland, in the form of an ARC Small Grant.

some respects typical of a larger class of person to which he belongs' (Birch 1971, p. 16). Studies of personal representativeness have been undertaken on bodies as varied as the upper echelons of the British civil service, the House of Lords, the Australian Labor Party, and the Australian High Court.

The second aspect of representativeness which features heavily in the literature is *political representativeness* (or what Birch (1971, p. 15) refers to as 'delegated representation'), the degree to which the politician or leader faithfully represents the political interests of members. Representativeness of this kind has the longer history of analysis which tends to concentrate on the relationship between the agent and principal: to what extent is the agent mandated by their principal (whether that be an individual or a constituency), and to what extent are they free to act or vote according to their conscience or their perception of the interests of the greater good (the nation, the association etc.)? (Pennock 1968, pp. 12–13). Fundamental to political representativeness is the existence of mechanisms of control over the agent by the principal, for otherwise the fidelity of the former to the wishes of the latter is purely episodic or coincidental. In mass institutions, political representativeness therefore involves some consideration of democratic accountability.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the dimensions of political and personal representativeness in the context of Australian unionism in the period since World War Two. The first part of the article is dedicated to an operationalisation of these two concepts within trade unions, paying particular attention to the social origin of union leaders and their democratic accountability. The two dimensions of representativeness generate a two-by-two matrix which allows us to identify four types of union. The bulk of the article is taken up by an assessment of representativeness in Australian unions in relation to this matrix. The article concludes with some consideration of the relationship between the two different dimensions of representativeness and the implications of this relationship for prospects for union revival.

Union Representativeness in Theory

Personal Representativeness

There are many ways in which the personal representativeness of union leaders might be measured. Two areas that have received attention are gender (Nightingale 1991; Pocock 1995) and place of birth (Nicolaou 1991; Bertone and Griffin 1992). In this paper I concentrate on social origins. The key distinction in this respect is whether the leadership is 'organic' or 'outsider'.

Broadly speaking, organic union leaders are those who come from the ranks. Organic union leaders are those sharing similar life experiences, with a similar educational and social class background, as the members who elect them. They are from the working class even if their new position in life means that they have risen from it. While they are likely to be older than the average member, given that organic union leaders by definition have worked to establish a reputation in the ranks, they are otherwise unremarkable prior to their reaching office, other than a particular enthusiasm for union work (and, quite possibly, active membership of a political party). They are therefore personally representative.

Outsiders are altogether different. Outsider union leaders do not arise from the ranks but, as it were, parachute in to the relevant union. Usually lacking any background in the occupation or industry, the outsider's means of entry into elected office is usually either by serving out the minimal time as a member required in the union's rules, or via an appointed position as research officer, industrial officer, or organiser, in both cases followed by subsequent incorporation onto a factional 'ticket' and election to a full-time position. Unlikely to be from the working class (given that most aspiring union officials from such a background would most likely stand for office in their own union), outsiders are frequently attracted to union office for reasons of political commitment, sometimes with a longer term objective of seeking preselection for political office. Outsiders commonly select their union not because of any familiarity with the occupation or calling of the members involved but because of political expediency, as sponsorship by the incumbent leadership, and thus similar factional alignment, is a necessity for people seeking union office by this means. Given these factors, outsider leaders are unlikely to be personally representative of members. By chance they may be of similar sex or national background, but their socio-economic characteristics are likely to be different. In particular, one would expect outsider leaders to have different work experience (by definition) and educational characteristics (commonly in the Australian case, such officials are university graduates with ALP backgrounds).

Political Representativeness

The second form of representativeness is political representativeness, the degree to which the leaders represent the interests of members. Given that there exists a lengthy and still unresolved debate in the political science literature about how such interests might be defined (Pitkin 1967, pp. 156–66), I use a variety of indirect means to *infer* representativeness. In particular, I suggest that political representativeness occurs when leaders are accountable to or otherwise under the control or influence of members. What determines accountability and control? In this article, I suggest that two

phenomena are crucial. First is the existence of formal constitutional provisions which hold leaders accountable, that is *representative democracy*, defined by Held (1988, p. 3) as 'a system of rule embracing elected "officers" who undertake to "represent" the interests and/or views of citizens within the framework of "the rule of law"'. Relevant constitutional provisions might include election, preferably direct election, of officials; right of recall of officials; limited terms of office; regular representative conferences to determine union policy; the right of factional opposition without expulsion; and the right to circulate oppositional material amongst the membership.

The existence of many elements of representative democracy is, however, not necessarily the best indicator of political representativeness. It is entirely possible for political institutions to have formally very democratic constitutions but to be led by figures who are only marginally under the control of constituents or members. Just as important an indicator of accountability of leaders, and thus political representativeness, is the presence of *participatory or direct democracy*, defined by Held (1988, p. 3) as 'a system of decision-making about public affairs in which citizens are directly involved'. Indications of direct democracy in trade unions include such things as the presence and extensive rights of union delegates; the existence of workplace or shop committees; the prevalence of section and mass meetings; and attendance at meetings of all types. These are all means by which rank and file members may, through their active participation, shape the goals, objectives, strategies and tactics pursued by their leaders.

Although analytically independent, it is likely in practice that there will be connections between participatory democracy and representative democracy. Specifically, it is likely that the more entrenched is the former, the higher the degree of representative democracy. An alert and active union membership is likely to guard its democratic rights jealously and to strongly resist any attempt to undermine democratic mechanisms that ensure control over its leaders.

In unions which enjoy both representative and participatory forms of democracy we may safely assume that the leadership is accountable. I infer from this that they will also be politically representative. Any union leader ignoring the wishes of members in such unions could not expect long tenure. Even before being ejected from office, we might expect their writ to run no further than their own office. By contrast, we might describe unions as bureaucratic which have neither form of democracy, or perhaps only the formal mechanisms of constitutional democracy without their regular use.

A Synthesis

In Table 1, I bring together these two dimensions of representativeness to define four union types.

Outsider bureaucratic unions (low political and personal representativeness) are unions in which members are alienated from any involvement in the running of their organisations. Such unions may either lack any semblance of constitutional democracy or possess such but lack any internal culture of participation and activity. A leadership cadre is formed and replenished from a body of political activists with no organic link to the union membership. Furthermore, the lack of membership involvement in union life means that no challenges are forthcoming from the membership to this leadership cadre. Not only does the lack of activism mean that the leadership caste is self-reproducing, but this in turn breeds cynicism amongst members and thereby deters membership involvement in their union. Outsider bureaucratic unions are likely to be relatively stable and to be shaken only by the birth of grassroots activism which throws up a challenge from below to the class of union mandarins.

Organic democratic unions (high political and personal representativeness) are the opposite to outsider bureaucratic unions in both key respects. Such unions have a lively local culture of activism at the base level and regular membership participation in union affairs. They will also have a tradition of official positions being taken from the ranks. They are similar, however, in that they are likely to be stable as a union type. Just as the absence of both political and personal representativeness is mutually reinforcing in the case of outsider bureaucratic unions, so the presence of both in the case of organic democratic unions is likely to strengthen this union type. Participatory democracy in such unions continuously creates and renews local networks of activists and, as a result, the leadership body is regularly replenished by new blood from the rank and file. This in turn creates a sense of ownership by members in their unions and thus participatory democracy.

Organic bureaucratic unions (low political and high personal representativeness) and outsider democratic unions (high political and low personal representativeness) are more complex. The former are unions where the leadership is drawn from the rank and file membership but where the instruments of democracy and accountability do not prevail in any meaningful sense. There may be no constitutional provision for election of leadership or right to form oppositions, or it may be simply that these exist but there is no culture of direct participation to give meaning to these rights. In such

Table 1: Union Type by Dimensions of Union Representativeness

<i>Leadership political representativeness</i>	<i>Leadership personal representativeness</i>	
	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Low	Outsider bureaucratic	Organic bureaucratic
High	Outsider democratic	Organic democratic

unions the leadership reproduces itself by cultivating individuals from the rank and file and drawing them in, perhaps to organiser positions in the first instance, as a form of de facto apprenticeship, before elevating them to elected office by nomination on the leadership's ticket. The leadership is 'of' the membership but is not 'for' the membership in any significant sense.

Unlike the first two union types, organic bureaucratic unionism has embedded within it an internal contradiction: the more bureaucratic the union, the less likely over the long term is its organic leadership to be sustained. The long-term limitation of this union type is a 'leadership gap'—the situation in which there is no evident successor generation of leadership, something that may result from the inert state of union life at the grassroots. It is possible, therefore, that in the long run such unions might simply slide into outsider bureaucratic unions, as organic leaders seek to organise a line of succession through appointed outsiders. Alternatively, a layer of local activists may emerge to challenge the incumbent leadership by means of its activity amongst membership and/or an election challenge. In this instance, the organic bureaucratic union type becomes organic democratic.

Outsider democratic unions are likely to be the least significant and most unstable of the four union types. They are run by outsiders and have both representative and participatory forms of democracy. This union type is unstable simply because a high level of workplace activism, and the means to express the will of the membership through electoral means, is likely over time to lead to workplace delegates being elected into leadership positions. Outsider democratic unions are, therefore, likely to become organic democratic unions over time. Alternatively, where the outsider leadership seeks to reproduce itself by annulling various avenues of political representativeness, the union simply mutates into the outsider bureaucratic form.

Union Representativeness in Practice

Having outlined the framework for analysis, let us now examine how representativeness in Australian unions has changed in the past 25 years in relation to the union types identified above. This requires an analysis, first, of trends in personal representativeness, followed by a study of trends in political representativeness. Evidence for this section is derived from a series of secondary and primary sources, including interviews with past and current union officials.²

Trends in Personal Representativeness

Traditional Pattern

The majority of Australian union leaders in the post-war decades have been organic leaders, that is, they arose from the ranks and were representative of union members in relation to socio-economic background and work experience. Until the 1970s and 1980s, most union officials had worked 'at the tools' for the majority of their early life, only becoming full-time officials after some years in the workforce. Dufty's 1977 survey of West Australian officials, for example, found that one-third had become officials when aged 41 or more, and three-quarters had at least 11 years prior work experience (Dufty 1980, p. 175). This pattern is confirmed by Davis' study of the 19 full-time officials in the Victorian branch of the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union (AMWU) in 1976. Eleven of them were aged between 41 and 50 when first elected to their positions, while a further two were aged between 51 and 60. Only one had been elected before the age of 30. These 19 officials had served an average of 21 years membership before becoming an official, five of them having been members for 30 years before taking an official position (Davis 1978, p. 181-83). Callus' 1984 survey of NSW union officials also confirms that this pattern was a fair reflection of the situation in NSW in the early 1980s: the majority of organisers had been shop stewards with at least ten years of union membership, and most executive officers had spent more than ten years as a member before obtaining office.

Outsider leaders were not entirely absent in this period. Conservative unions such as the Clerks and the Shop Assistants employed university graduates in leadership positions. The same occurred in left-wing unions even before World War Two, with the Ironworkers appointing leading Communist Party of Australia (CPA) member Ernie Thornton as temporary organiser in 1934 before electing him national secretary in 1936, despite his having no experience as an ironworker (Murray and White 1982, p. 90). Likewise, the Mineworkers Federation employed CPA member Edgar Ross not only as editor of the union's newspaper, *Common Cause*, but also as the union's representative on the NSW Labor Council Executive for nearly 30 years, despite his never having

been a miner. Such appointments were the exception, however, and do not alter the basic description of Australian union leadership as predominantly organic until the 1970s.

New Pattern

Since the 1970s, the outsider leader has become increasingly significant within the Australian labour movement. This trend is most apparent, not coincidentally, within the movement's most senior ranks. Three of the last five ACTU Presidents (since 1969) have been officers whose entry into the union movement has been via a stint as a 'salaried expert' (Bob Hawke, who served as President from 1969 to 1980, Simon Crean (1985–90), and Martin Ferguson (1990–95)).³ None of the three had worked outside the union movement as a waged worker following graduation from university. The same is true for former Secretary Bill Kelty and almost true for current Secretary Greg Combet (see Table 2). There are also examples, however, of organic leaders even at the highest levels of the ACTU. Cliff Dolan (ACTU President from 1980 to 1985) had no university education and had trained and worked as an electrical mechanic for 13 years, before becoming an organiser for 11 years and thence NSW branch secretary of the Electrical Trades Union at the age of 40. Dolan did not attain a seat on the ACTU Executive until the age of 51 (*Who's Who* 1999). Jennie George (President 1995–2000) and now Sharan Burrow (President 2000–) both worked as teachers prior to entering full-time office. The result is that although outsiders form the majority, the ACTU leadership has a mix of the two types.

The same mix is apparent throughout the union movement. Organisers tend to be appointed both from the membership and from the ranks of university graduates and political activists. Senior elected officials are drawn from former organisers, former research and industrial officers, and direct from the membership. Expert officers are the category of staff most likely to have been recruited from outside the union, although this was not always the case. The AMWU, for example, which was at the forefront of appointing expert officers in the early 1970s, sought first of all to fill these positions from their own ranks. The first education officers appointed by the union—Ted Gnatenko (SA), Max Ogden (Victoria), Jim McKiernan (WA), and Bob Richardson (NSW) were all tradesmen. This was also true of the union's first research officer (Jack Hutson, Victoria), and the union's first workers compensation officer (Sol Marks, Victoria). Similar practices prevailed in the NSW Builders Labourers Federation in the early 1970s (Burgmann and Burgmann 1998, p. 68). Even today, some white-collar unions (such as the teachers unions and the public service unions) rely almost exclusively on their own members for such positions. Nonetheless, most blue-collar unions now use outsiders for most expert positions.

Table 2: Backgrounds of ACTU National Office Bearers, 1999

<i>Name and Position</i>	<i>Qualifications attained</i>	<i>Work experience following graduation and before becoming a FTO</i>	<i>Career profile</i>
Jennie George, President	BA, Dip Ed, Sydney University, 1969	5 years secondary school teaching	1973: elected to full-time position as welfare officer in NSW Teachers Federation, subsequently elected to President and General Secretary (1979). 1983: elected to ACTU Executive. 1987: elected ACTU Vice President 1989–91: appointed to senior positions in TUTA 1991: elected ACTU Assistant Secretary 1996: elected ACTU President 2000: resigned from ACTU and appointed a director of Delta Electricity (NSW power) as an interim measure prior to election to a seat in the NSW Upper House.
Bill Kelty, Secretary	BEd, La Trobe University, 1969	None	1970: appointed to position of Industrial Officer, Storeman and Packers Union 1974: appointed to position as ACTU research officer 1977: elected ACTU Assistant Secretary 1983: elected ACTU Secretary 2000: resigned from ACTU and appointed a director of Linfox (trucking and distribution).
Greg Combet, Assistant Secretary	Bachelor of Mining Engineering (Hons.), University of NSW; BEd, Sydney University; Diploma in Labour Relations and Law, Sydney University	1 year in mining industry; 4 years as research officer for various NGOs	1987: appointed Industrial Officer, Waterside Workers Federation 1993: appointed ACTU Senior Industrial Officer. 1996: elected ACTU Assistant Secretary 1999: ACTU Secretary elect

Table 2 cont'd.

<i>Name and Position</i>	<i>Qualifications attained</i>	<i>Work experience following graduation and before becoming a FTO</i>	<i>Career profile</i>
Tim Pallas, Assistant Secretary	BA, ANU, 1981 LLB, ANU, 1983	None	1983: appointed Industrial Officer, Firefighters Union 1985–94: appointed to succession of positions within Storeman and Packers Union (subsequently National Union of Workers) and finally elected Assistant Secretary. 1994: elected ACTU Assistant Secretary
Bill Mansfield, Assistant Secretary	Telecom technician training, 1958–62 LLB, Melbourne University, 1972	Telecom Trainee/ Technical officer in Post Office, 4 years	1963: elected Assistant Secretary Telecoms Employees Association (ATEA), Victorian branch. 1966–71: research assistant/ industrial officer in ATEA federal office. 1972: elected Assistant General Secretary 1977: elected Federal Secretary ATEA 1985: elected ACTU Assistant Secretary

Source: ACTU National Voice Internet site: www.actu.asn.au/national/people/actu/

Although a mix of outsider and organic leaders is common, the growing importance of the former is suggested by indirect evidence which demonstrates a wide educational gap between leaders and members. Past generations of organic union leaders in blue-collar unions had traditionally no experience of university, and were disproportionately tradespeople or had only basic qualifications. In 1970, 81 per cent of officials in Western Australia, for example, had left school aged 15 or less, and only two per cent had tertiary training (Johnston, cited in Dufty 1980). By 1977, the figure had dropped to 59 per cent (Dufty 1980, p. 174), but even as late as 1984, the majority of NSW union secretaries who responded to Callus' survey had left school at this age. In white-collar unions, the much larger proportion of officials with university degrees reflected the fact that the membership of such unions was tertiary qualified in large part (Cupper 1983, p. 200).⁴ In both cases, therefore,

it can be safely assumed that traditional organic leaders were personally representative of the membership in relation to their educational background (although in the case of unions covering skilled and unskilled workers, they were more likely to have trades qualifications).

The growing significance of outsiders from the 1970s onwards is demonstrated by the fact that union officials are now much more likely to be university qualified, both in relation to the past and in relation to union members at large. Table 3 demonstrates that in 1996, one-half (48.5 per cent) of all Australian trade union officials possessed an undergraduate or postgraduate university qualification, as against only one-quarter (25.6 per cent) of the employed workforce.⁵

Likewise, the five senior ACTU officers held nine degrees or diplomas between them (Table 2). This trend is likely to be exaggerated by the impact of the ACTU's Organising Works programme: nearly half (46.8%) of the 280 trainees taken on by Organising Works between 1994 and 1998 were university graduates (Turnbull 1995, p. 8; Organising Works Annual Report 1998). These data together add weight to Scott's observation:

Labor's great achievement last century in overturning the old, elitist attitude that 'common' people have no place in government has been sadly compromised by the progress, in recent decades, of this doctrine that 'ordinary' people have no real political role. The trade union movement is facing a parallel erosion of grassroots participation, in that the processes enabling rank and file workers to become senior officials have broken down in many major unions and peak councils.

(Scott 1991, p. 49)

Trends in Political Representativeness

While trends in personal representativeness can be assessed relatively easily by tracking educational and career profiles of union officials, trends in political representativeness are rather more difficult to judge. Any attempt to make a definitive judgement is complicated by the various ways in which representative and participatory democracy can be measured, the balance between these two—if a union becomes more democratic in terms of representation but less democratic in terms of participation, what is the overall outcome in terms of political representativeness of the leadership?—and enormous variation between unions. In what follows I make some broad judgements in relation to the overall picture, while acknowledging the fact that these may not give full recognition to the complexity of the situation.

Table 3: Highest Educational Qualification Attained, Full-Time Officials and Employed Workers, By Age, 1996, Per Cent

<i>Full-time officials</i>	<i>By age (years)</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>16-24</i>	<i>25-49</i>	<i>50+</i>	
Higher degree, postgraduate diploma	3.5	13.6	10.2	12.3
Bachelor degree, undergraduate and associate diploma	53.3	37.5	26.1	36.2
Skilled vocational qualification	0.0	10.6	19.8	11.8
Basic vocational qualification	4.6	3.9	3.7	3.9
No qualifications	38.6	34.4	40.3	35.9

<i>Employed workers</i>	<i>By age (years)</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>16-24</i>	<i>25-49</i>	<i>50+</i>	
Higher degree or postgraduate diploma	0.5	5.3	5.0	4.4
Bachelor degree, undergraduate and associate diploma	14.5	23.8	18.1	21.2
Skilled vocational qualification	9.7	16.8	16.3	15.4
Basic vocational qualification	4.0	4.2	3.0	3.9
No qualifications	71.3	49.9	57.6	55.0

Notes: N (union officials): 4,171
N (employed workforce): 7,044,813

Source: ABS, *Census of Population and Housing 1996*

Traditional Pattern

Representative Democracy

If judged at the level of formal representative democracy, Australian unions have traditionally rated modestly. Where membership pressure and leadership inclination has not been sufficient in its own right, the intervention of the state, in the form of the Industrial Registrar and Federal Court (applying relevant legislation), has ensured that registered unions have had at least the formal instruments of representative democracy (Boulton 1982). Conferences of delegates, usually elected by members, are the sovereign body of most unions. In between conferences, executive committees, elected either directly or on a collegial basis, carry out the work of unions. These committees are usually numerically dominated by lay members elected from the ranks, and votes are usually limited to those elected by members, not appointees. Officials are usually elected, usually for terms of no more than four years, and between elections, the full-time leadership is accountable to the executive committee. Provisions exist which prevent union officials from using union funds, materials and publications for their own election campaigns. Opposition to the incumbent leadership has not been grounds for expulsion from the union.

There are strict limits to representative democracy in Australian unions, however, and these are most evident at the highest levels of the ACTU whose Executive is only elected by a collegiate method rather than by direct election. Conferences are held every two years, but the President is elected only every six years. No constitutional mechanism exists to enable rank and file members of affiliated unions to remove the president, vice presidents or assistant secretaries from office for inadequate performance. There is no constitutional requirement for conference delegates (for the most part full-time officials) to vote in accordance with the wishes of the majority of their members.

The main problem with representative democracy in Australian unions is not, however, the absence of formal constitutional rights such as these, but the gap between the existing mechanisms and the practice. In particular, a combination of a leadership desire for self-preservation and membership apathy has allowed union rule books to be severely compromised. The periodic history of ballot-rigging in the Australian union movement, the misuse of union funds and resources, the intimidation of opponents, and the 'stacking' of executive committees and conferences are only a few indications of this fact. Nonetheless, despite the many limitations of representative democracy that do exist, Australian unions are not gangster unions. One indication of the fact that members do retain some control over their leaders through constitutional means is the fact that, at least when compared to American and British unions, leadership turnover in Australian unions has been relatively high.

Participatory Democracy

If representative democracy was alive, if not in rude health, in most Australian unions in the post-war decades, the same was not true of participatory democracy. Indeed, it could be fairly said that the majority of unions scored relatively poorly in relation to participatory democracy, a factor that set strict limits to political representativeness. An important minority of unions, however, did enjoy rather higher levels of participatory democracy. The key factor determining the incidence of participatory democracy was the overall industrial and political strategy pursued by unions. Table 4 summarises the key features of the two dominant strategies in the post-war decades, the 'arbitrationist' and the 'mobilisational'.

The arbitrationist strategy, by far the dominant, was usually associated with top-down bureaucratic relations between leaders and members. Indeed, the arbitrationist strategy was premised on such relations, as the Arbitration Court/Commission usually relied on union leaders to maintain tight control over 'their' unions in order to avoid strike activity while a hearing was in

Table 4: Scope for Participatory Democracy: Arbitrationist and Mobilisational Unionism

<i>Period</i>	<i>Arbitrationist 1945–1990</i>	<i>Mobilisational 1945–late 1970s</i>
Exemplars	Australian Workers Union; Shop Distributive and Allied Employees; Federated Clerks Union; Vehicle Builders Union; Federated Ironworkers Association.	Australian Metal Workers Union (and its predecessors); Building Workers Industrial Union; Waterside Workers Federation; Builders Labourers Federation; Victorian Secondary Teachers Association (in later period).
Underlying goals	Gradual economic improvement through industrial and political means.	Economic improvement underpinned by vision of radical social transformation.
Industrial strategy	Distributive bargaining (win–lose) limited by extent of claim (modest) and terrain of struggle (wages and hours).	More aggressive distributive bargaining in relation to extent of claim (substantial) and terrain of struggle (equity issues; control over work; social and political demands).
Relations with employers	‘Sweetheart’; preference agreements; closed shops and dues check–off, in return for industrial peace.	Industrial campaigns at ‘hot–shops’ to make break–throughs. Preference clauses and closed shops won by industrial campaigns.
Tactics in relation to state	Emphasis on arbitration and deals with ALP state governments.	Marginal role for political lobbying; disdain for arbitration except insofar as it was used to flow–on gains from ‘hot shops’.
Attitude to strikes	Extreme reluctance to strike beyond what was necessary to expedite an arbitration hearing.	Frequent preparedness to strike.
Approach by FTOs to members	Top down; bureaucratic; collusion with employers to suppress membership activism.	Participatory; active role of delegates and mass meetings.
Role of delegates and workplace organisation	Minimal: guard against award breaches; recruit and collect dues.	Extensive: as for arbitrationist, plus responsibility for waging campaigns (sometimes quite independently of FTOs).
Main mechanism for communication between leaders and rank and file	Personal relations between delegates and officials; branch committees; branch journals and newsletters. Otherwise relatively little.	Mass meetings, delegate meetings; branch committees; branch journals and newsletters.

progress. Wildcat action by members, such as occurred at Mount Isa Mines in 1964 (Mackie 1989) and at the Ford Motor Company in 1973 and 1981 (Lever–Tracy and Quinlan 1988), only discredited and embarrassed the arbitrationist union leader, and for this reason she/he was usually keen to suppress independent member activism, not excluding co–operating with

employers to have activists dismissed from their jobs. The suppression of such activism also had the added advantage that it prevented the emergence of potential rivals for the leadership office. Leadership succession in such unions was usually a matter of hand-picking a favoured individual within the ranks and grooming him or her for an accession to power.

The role of delegates in unions pursuing the arbitrationist strategy was limited to that of guarding against award breaches, recruitment and collection of dues (where no dues 'check-off' arrangements existed). Delegate training was limited, and stewards were supported only insofar as they were perceived to be useful to the political longevity of the leader. Such an approach underpinned the ACTU's 1961 policy on shop committees which, according to Hutson (1966, p. 219), effectively reduced these bodies to 'the minor role of industrial boy scouts'. With little need for organising on the job, mass meetings were few and far between, and communication from leaders to members was usually fairly infrequent and mostly in the form of often dull union journals. The choice of an arbitrationist strategy was usually self-reinforcing. Suppression of autonomous organisation at workplace level meant that few challenges to the power and strategy of union leaders emerged.

The nature of the internal regime in unions following a mobilisational strategy was diametrically opposite to that in force in the arbitrationist unions. Such unions were often characterised by a high level of membership, or at least workplace activist, participation. Here we will give evidence of two such unions, the engineers and the Victorian teachers unions. Membership participation had a long tradition in the AEU, which until 1967 was run by district committees. Full-time officials could attend and could speak at such meetings, but had no voting rights. Typically the district committees would invite the unions' officials to the meeting so that they might give a report to members about their activities. The AEU's first appointed education officer, Max Ogden, explains:

In the old district committees it was very interesting. It was physically laid out so that all the district committee sat around the table and the officials—the four or five we had—would only speak when they were asked to, or when they gave their reports. All of that gave a culture of rank and file control.

More important than the AEU's constitutional structures in maintaining the union's democratic culture was the fact that the union very actively promoted shop steward activity (Goss 1975; Scalmer and Irving 1999). Ted Gnatenko, AEU shop steward at GMH Elizabeth and later the South Australian branch's first education officer, remarks that: 'In the '60s and '70s, the shop stewards were masters of the union, and the organisers were the servants'. While there is certainly an element of exaggeration in this description (see Davis 1977, 1978

for a discussion of the limits of steward participation in the AMWU), this comment conveys something of the culture of the AEU and other metal trades unions in the late 1960s in the larger and more active factories and workshops.

The Victorian teachers unions were an example of unions which in the early post-war decades relied on arbitrationist methods (in their case involving appearances before a State Government teachers' tribunal), but which in the wave of industrial action in the 1970s shifted to a mobilisational strategy. Membership participation in these unions increased rapidly in this period. The Victorian Secondary Teachers Association (VSTA) held frequent school delegates meetings which had significant influence on the union's monthly state council meetings which took charge of the union between conferences. State council meetings were attended by 40 or more rank and file teachers and only one full-time official, the union's president. Significant here was the fact that the president was the only elected full-time official in this union. All others were appointed. Political representativeness of the leadership, if judged by representative democracy, was therefore minimal; in practice, however, political representativeness was secured by the activity of the membership which held its leadership accountable not at elections once every three or four years but on an ongoing basis. Participatory democracy was also on the rise in the Technical Teachers Union of Victoria (TTUV) at this time, Neil Kimpton, a former organiser, recalling that:

A lot of the activity was school-based. Sometimes there were state-wide actions, but much of the conditions were fought for on a school-by-school basis... The culture of participation in those days manifested itself at the school level through very strong union branches in numbers of schools. There were active branches who not only took action on themselves but who told the union what they thought should be done in the areas of staffing or curriculum or whatever.

The Victorian teacher unions were not alone amongst the white-collar public-sector professional associations in undergoing a sharp shift in the 1970s, with many branches of the various public-service unions also affected by the influx of radical university graduates espousing democratic and participatory union strategies (Kuhn 1980).

To summarise, Australian unionism in the post-war decades enjoyed elements of representative democracy, but the degree to which union leaders could be regarded as political representative was primarily dependent on the salience of participatory democracy. A majority of unions might best be described as bureaucratic in that they combined modest representative democracy with low levels of participatory democracy. A minority, however, those which pursued mobilisational strategies, might be regarded as politically representative in that they had moderate to high levels of participatory democracy which

ensured that mechanisms of representative democracy were more meaningful. A further factor that needs to be borne in mind was the fact that the relationship between representative democracy and participatory democracy was not always straightforward. The type of constitutional provisions most of interest to the Industrial Registrar were those aimed at curbing industrial militancy rather than promoting democracy per se. Indeed, at times, union leaders and arbitration commissioners made judicious use of union rules (most especially those relating to the activities and rights (or lack thereof) of workplace union committees) in order to constrain participatory democracy.

New Patterns

Decline in representative democracy

While the Australian union movement has undergone massive structural change since the 1980s, particularly evident in the wave of amalgamations, change in the area of representative democracy has been quite modest. In relation to union rules regarding frequency of elections, for example, four years still appears to be the most common term of office. Two factors do stand out, however, as indicative of a decline in representative democracy. First is the growing trend for ACTU leadership positions to be taken by those who have either never faced a direct membership election or have done so on only one or two occasions. The position in 1999 was as follows: Secretary Bill Kelty and Assistant Secretary Greg Combet had never faced direct election by rank and file members and rose to their current positions solely on the basis of appointments and votes at ACTU congresses. Tim Pallas, the third ACTU Assistant Secretary, had faced only one election, to his position as Assistant Secretary of the National Union of Workers, having been appointed industrial officer by that union some five years previously. The exceptions in 1999 were President Jennie George and Assistant Secretary Bill Mansfield who had faced members at direct elections on several occasions prior to taking senior positions within the ACTU. Of the past ACTU presidents, Crean and Hawke were never directly elected in any rank and file vote, while Ferguson faced election in the Miscellaneous Workers Union on only two occasions, having been appointed a research officer in the union's federal office five years previously.

The situation in the ACTU Executive is typical of a broader tendency for a growing proportion of union staff to be appointed rather than elected, something which automatically reduces democratic accountability of the leadership body, both in relation to the officers concerned and because such officers may be used by elected officials to buttress their own power and reduce their vulnerability to election challenge.

The second factor that has lessened the effectiveness of formal mechanisms of representative democracy is the process of union amalgamation, which has increased both complexity and size of unions. What are the interests of 'the membership' in unions with a heterogeneous membership, where the component unions have been amalgamated not on the basis of identity of interest but factional alignment? And how might these interests be safeguarded by members who are scattered across a large number of workplaces of very different types? The more blurred and uncertain are members' collective interests and the less able are members to come together to advance their interests, the more scope the leadership has to impose its own agenda. In relation to size, the issue of election costs arises. The larger the union, the more difficult it becomes for an opposition slate to find the resources to effectively contest an election, and therefore, the more secure are the incumbents.

To summarise; although relatively little has changed in terms of constitutional provisions underpinning representative democracy, the significance of these provisions has been undermined by the fact that the officials duly elected are a declining majority of those employed, and because participation in election contests has become increasingly prohibitive in terms of costs and personnel. Representative democracy in Australian unions has, therefore, diminished.

Decline in participatory democracy

More significant in terms of contributing to a decline in the level of political representativeness of Australian union leaders since the 1970s has been the decline in participatory democracy. By the time that Labor won office in 1983, the grassroots organisation characteristic of the mobilisational unions in the 1960s and 1970s had significantly deteriorated.⁶ The corporatist strategy associated with the Accord confirmed the demise of the mobilisational strategy, as it was associated with the suppression of industrial campaigns likely to threaten commitments by the unions to make no further claims beyond those arising out of National Wage Cases (see Table 5).

Speaking of the metal unions, Ted Gnatenko recalls:

The Accord was the biggest factor in the decline of union activity, because the power of the shop stewards, the concept of the log of claims, the concept of participation was eliminated. And I think that was viewed with a great deal of scepticism. The workers said 'Why should I attend meetings? Why should I do these things? It's already been decided on my behalf anyway. We didn't make any input into it, and it's been endorsed on our behalf'.

....There was a disenchantment with the union. It accelerated apathy amongst the membership. While they remained in the union, their

allegiances were questionable. They were there because they had to be there in order to keep their jobs.

The involvement of some stewards, particularly full-time stewards, in industry restructuring programs, and the introduction of second-tier negotiations and award restructuring in the late 1980s may have brought some delegates back into activity (Rimmer 1989, p. 141), but the political basis on which they were active was very different to that in the 1960s and 1970s. They were now incorporated into an agenda of improving company competitiveness (frequently at the expense of jobs and working conditions), rather than fighting for improved wages and conditions (Scalmer and Irving 1999).

The manufacturing unions were not alone in witnessing a decline in grassroots activism in the Accord years. In the Victorian education unions, involvement in budget-setting and a range of high-level consultative structures heralded a significant shift in the centre of gravity of these unions. Neil Kimpton, formerly organiser with the TTUV, explains the situation that prevailed in the Cain and Kirner years:

You might have some action around the time that the agreements are being negotiated, but once the agreements have been negotiated, the vast number of the reasons for having stopworks disappeared. You've agreed on the number of hours, you've agreed on the class sizes. So a lot of the reasons disappeared. What you had in its place was organisers policing the agreements rather than people taking industrial action around it. And a formal grievance procedure was set up. If a principal was silly enough to give someone too many kids in a class, you don't have a stop-work over it, you have a grievance. And an officer from the union goes out there with an officer from the department and you argue it out. You don't need the people out on the grass.

The effect of these trends was a steady decline in school-based activity, the centralisation of power within the unions, and, in the absence of mass meetings associated with the mobilisational strategy, the distancing of leaders from members.

It is now widely accepted in senior union circles that the corporatist strategy's undermining of workplace unionism backfired in some important respects (Evatt Foundation 1995, p. 57). This has been responsible for the rise of what might be called the activist approach which attempts to reverse years of decline (Table 5). ACTU publications *Unions 2001* and *unions@work*, in particular, make much of the need for strong delegate organisation. However, there are limits as to how far delegate activity is to be promoted under the activist strategy. Specifically, an enhanced role for delegates does not appear

Table 5: Scope for Participatory Democracy: Corporatist and Activist Unionism

<i>Period</i>	<i>Corporatist 1983–93</i>	<i>Activist 1995–present</i>
Exemplars	Australian Metal Workers Union, Building Workers Industrial Union, Community and Public Sector Union	Australian Education Union, Community and Public Sector Union
Underlying goals	(i) Business competitiveness (ii) Social reforms through Government action.	'Holding the line': survival and renewal.
Industrial strategy	Integrative bargaining (win-win), but in practice acceptance of work intensification and cuts in real wages.	Distributive bargaining, evident in living wage cases, but pursued through legal and bureaucratic avenues.
Relations with employers	Partnership for industrial efficiency.	Defensive in face of new employer strategy of union-busting.
Tactics in relation to state	Top-down deal-making between ACTU and ALP federal government, replicated at state level	Disenchantment with 'political action' (e.g. 'never another Accord'). Active use of courts and arbitration where possible (living wage cases; unfair dismissal cases; certification of enterprise bargaining agreements; management of change agreements).
Relations with other unions	In theory, 'industry unionism' driven by ACTU amalgamation strategy; in practice, federative unionism driven by factional expediency.	Co-operation in adverse circumstances (eg Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, Australian Metal Workers Union, Maritime Union of Australia and Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union alliance in Victoria) alongside fratricidal disputes within amalgamated unions.
Attitude to strikes	Hostility to strikes.	Preparedness to strike in limited circumstances when provoked by employers. Emphasis on 'positive media image'.
Approach by FTOs to members	Top down; bureaucratic; involvement of narrow layer of full-time delegates.	Nominally bottom-up and activist, but in episodes of industrial struggle (eg Maritime Union of Australia; Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union at BHP) top down and bureaucratic.
Role of delegates and workplace organisation	Minimal; some role for full-time delegates in 'restructuring committees', overseas tours etc.	Heavy emphasis on recruitment; some responsibility for enterprise bargaining.
Main mechanism for communication between leaders and rank and file	Mainstream media appearances; branch journals and newsletters. Otherwise relatively little.	Growing use of marketing and communication techniques: surveys; focus groups; internet.

to be associated with increased power for delegates. This was evident during the MUA dispute with Patrick Stevedores, when delegates and members played the role of back-up to the union's legal and media strategies. Another example of this trend was the campaign by the Victorian education unions against the newly-elected Kennett Government in 1992-93. Following a series of one-day strikes, the leaders of these unions resolved to bring relief to their members by seeking refuge in a federal award. Neil Kimpton explains the impact on the union:

... [W]e spent literally hundreds of thousands of dollars not on campaigning but on lawyers' fees, getting into the Commission and getting the award up and running. And though we used our members to put our case together, we did move into essentially the way which every other white-collar union operates. We were no longer focussed on the rank and file, the grass roots, but we were focussed on getting something through the courts that would negate the need to have to drag out the troops every other day.

The endorsement by the ACTU in *unions@work* of more elaborate channels of communication, such as postal surveys, mail shots and email networks, also has the effect of further marginalising membership control over their unions. While apparently more effective in ensuring that every individual member is contacted by the union office, such techniques are less participatory than membership meetings because they frame the nature of relations between leaders and members in an individualistic fashion, which strictly limits the control by the latter over the former.

The activist strategy is implicitly based on an assessment that members cannot be mobilised behind vigorous industrial campaigns because of fear occasioned by years of high unemployment, legal strictures and the residual impact of the Accord. This is certainly the case in the Australian Education Union, whose school-based representative structures have now withered. The monthly regional meetings, which used to attract dozens of delegates, are now sparsely attended. Peter Lord from the Australian Education Union reports that:

There's been a decline in rank and file participation in all of those unions [VTU, TTUV, VSTA] over the years. And rank and file participation has now reached a stage where it is hardly much more than nil. To say minimal is the politest way to describe it.

The problem is that the activist strategy itself does nothing to rebuild member activism, and thus participatory democracy, as it shares with the arbitrationist and the corporatist strategies, the conception of the membership as an 'object' of leadership strategy rather than a subject capable of determining its own destiny.

There are signs of a challenge to the activist strategy, or perhaps more accurately, a reinterpretation of the activist strategy which might contribute to the revival of participatory democracy. This is most evident in Victoria: on several occasions in recent years, the Victorian Trades Hall Council has organised large rallies in protest at federal government industrial relations plans, most recently with a demonstration of 80,000 against Reith's 'second wave' in November 1999. At the level of individual unions in Victoria, changes within the AMWU and the increased linkages between this union, the CFMEU, CEPU and MUA also suggest a more genuinely participatory approach to union organising. Nonetheless, whether this leads to ongoing local organising remains to be seen.

From the foregoing, it is evident, first, that there has been a moderate decline in representative democracy in Australian unions since the 1970s and, second, in that minority of unions which enjoyed elements of participatory democracy in the 1960s and 1970s, this has been significantly reduced. The overall impact is a decline in political representativeness and, therefore, a further shift in the direction of bureaucratic unionism.

Summary

Referring back to Table 1, this review of Australian unionism in the period since World War Two demonstrates that the majority of Australian unions may traditionally best be described as 'organic bureaucratic' with a minority characterised as 'organic democratic'. Since the 1970s, however, Australian unionism has moved towards the union type 'outsider bureaucratic'. Organic bureaucratic unionism has diminished and, as predicted, shows signs of sliding into outsider bureaucratic unionism as a result of an ever increasing reliance of outsiders. Organic democratic unionism has also declined under the impact of the decline in mobilisational union strategies since the mid-1970s.

Discussion

This study of political representativeness and personal representativeness in Australian unions suggests that the two concepts, although analytically independent, are in practice inter-connected. This fact is intuitively fairly straightforward in the case of the more traditional conservative or arbitrationist unions. It has long been understood, for example, that the domination of males, commonly graduates and almost universally with no retail experience, in the leadership of the female-dominated Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association is indicative of the negligible degree of rank and file activism in this union. Little has changed in traditionally bureaucratic unions of this type. The connection between the two dimensions of representativeness is also evident when we consider trends in the formerly

mobilisational unions. The evidence in these unions suggests that the decline in political representativeness (occasioned by the decline in participatory democracy) in such unions is responsible for the decline in personal representativeness. This in turn contributes to a further decline in political representativeness in such unions. Why is this so?

The corporatist strategy did not just reduce participatory democracy in formerly mobilisational unions (as noted above in the case of the metal trades and teacher unions), but also reinforced the tendency towards the appointment of outsiders. The corporatist strategy was based upon high-level intervention in a range of bipartite and tripartite committees at enterprise and sector levels. The skills that were required were no longer those of mass mobilisation but economics and law. Ted Gnatenko commented at the time:

The gulf [between the members and the national officials] tends to be widened by the tendency of the ACTU, Trades and Labour Councils and some unions at national level to appoint officers whose job is to advise and provide information to national (federal) officials on matters such as industry development and other matters... Increasingly, such people tend to be selected for their academic qualifications rather than their union experience or their commitment to the union movement.

(Gnatenko 1990, p. 10)

This process was substantially assisted by large-scale Government financial support. Between 1984–85 and 1994–95, unions received \$51.3 million in grants from the Federal Government, most of which was tied to the employment of labour technocrats who ‘serviced’ union involvement in such processes, formulated strategies justifying union co-operation in them, and helped to create an extended staff apparatus insulating the elected leaders from membership pressure.

The parallel development of industrial partnership strategies and the employment of outsiders is also clear from trends in the Victorian secondary schools sector under the Cain Government. Brian Henderson, then secretary of the VSTA, explains:

[W]ith Labor in office there was a chance for consultation when in the past there wasn't. [...] This period called for a different set of skills in the union office. In the past, all you had to do was say you didn't like what the government was putting up and then call your members out and go into negotiations about it. But now you were talking about implementing things in relation to system-wide change. We were involved in discussions about budgets and budget targets that the government wanted to meet, and how we could meet those targets.

The type of skills now sought by unions were now defined by their 'expert' nature, the knowledge being defined as something that could only be brought to the union by outsiders and learned through advanced study.

It has not just been the corporatist approach that has led to increasing reliance on outsiders, but the activist approach as well. Where unions such as the MUA rely less on port delegate committees and more on the courts and press relations to advance their case, so the role of lawyers, financial advisers and media consultants is enhanced. The same is true with the communication strategies advocated by *unions@work*. This trend towards appointment of outsiders is therefore both premised on and contributes further to a decline in participatory democracy.

The other significant reason why the decline in participatory democracy led over time to increased reliance on outsiders, and thus diminished personal representativeness of union leaders, was because top-down unionism of the type embedded in corporatist and activist strategies discourages the rise of organic leaders from the ranks, thereby allowing, or making it more attractive for unions to rely on outsiders.

Declining personal representativeness is therefore significant because it is indicative of a change in the nature of unionism, from collective organisation which brings together workers for the purpose of joint improvement of conditions of employment and rights at work (albeit, admittedly, only in that minority of unions which were mobilisational), to one in which experts are in charge and in which members' role is limited to that of a stage army used for extra leverage at crucial points in negotiations. The long-term significance of these trends was outlined by Gnatenko in 1990:

The consequences of these developments for the union movement are most serious. The more ordinary members are excluded from the decision-making process, the more agreements that are made without consulting the membership, the more irrelevant the union will become in their eyes. Agreement without consultation will also mean that the shop stewards system, upon which the strength of the union movement ultimately depends, will tend to wither away through simple lack of use.

(Gnatenko 1990, p. 10)

While the decline in participatory democracy and thus political representativeness has had an impact on personal representativeness, so it is possible that reduced personal representativeness has also had an impact on participatory democracy, in that it may have contributed to membership alienation from their unions. There is a general preference amongst members of many unions for their leaders to come from the ranks, and the fact that this is

increasingly not the case has important implications. Transport Workers Union (TWU) organiser, Ivan McGillivray, reports on the culture amongst truck drivers:

I don't agree with people coming to unions from university backgrounds, for the simple reason that I've been a worker all my life, and I think to really appreciate and understand what our members have got to go through you have to come through the ranks. [...]

If you bring in university graduates, you are bringing in educated people who have got no feeling for what the worker is going through starting at bloody two or three in the morning, freezing his balls off, bloody on the side of the road changing bloody tyres in the mud and the shit—what experience has a university graduate got in that sort of situation? And the driver comes to the yard and there's some fella there in a collar and fucken' tie and he says, 'Good morning sir. And how are you this fine and lovely day?'. Well, how the fucking hell do you think the member is going to respond? I know how I would respond. I'd tell him to piss off!

Ted Gnatenko recalls the feeling prevalent in the AMWU in the heyday of the Accord:

The ACTU thought that by having people with academic backgrounds, they could match wits with the government... But it was very demoralising, because the union membership did not see those people as their people. They were either seen as neutral or as closer to the employers because their English was different, their background was different. Rightly or wrongly, that was how it was.

This attitude is not unique to blue-collar unions. Neil Kimpton reports on the dominant beliefs in the TTUV in the 1970s and 1980s:

The 'tech philosophy was that you needed people who knew what was happening on the ground.... There was still that argument that all we needed was people who had a teaching background and a union background, who'd been 'out on the grass'. That was the phrase that was used. We needed someone who'd been out on the grass and in front of a classroom with forty-plus kids.

Insofar as declining personal representativeness reduces members' sense of identification with their unions, it is therefore arguable (although certainly not proven), that it contributes to lower participatory democracy. It may also lead to a backlash. Chris Fennell, TWU organiser, explains how the current Victorian branch leadership of this union came to office:

We ran a ticket called 'Kick the impostors out!' because the majority of the people were non-transport workers, not people from the industry. We ran on a ticket to clean the industry up, to have transport people representing transport workers. Every one of us is from the industry.

Similarly, the defeat by the Workers First faction of the incumbent leadership of the metals division of the Victorian branch of the AMWU in 1998 was at least partly attributed at the time to the (incorrect) perception that the union office had been taken over by university graduates (*Industrial Relations and Management Letter*, June 1998, p.12).

Reversing the trend to outsider bureaucratic unionism requires a fundamental change in the strategies pursued by Australian unions in recent years, and most importantly, the revival of rank and file activism and power. This is crucial, first because it is necessary if participatory democracy and thus political representativeness is to recover. Second, because such activism will be crucial in generating a reservoir from which a new generation of organic leaders may emerge. Merely replacing outsider leaders with organic leaders with no other change will result only in the substitution of organic bureaucratic leadership for its outsider variant.

Endnotes

- 1 See Pitkin (1967), Pennock and Chapman (1968) and Birch (1971) for overviews of the classic literature.
- 2 The quotations that follow are drawn from these interviews, which took place by phone or in person between January and May 1999.
- 3 Callus (1986) coined the term 'salaried expert' which usefully captures positions such as research officer, industrial officer, and legal officer, posts which are usually taken by university graduates.
- 4 Thirty-six per cent of officials from the 34 white-collar unions surveyed by Cupper in 1979 held a university qualification (Cupper 1983, p. 200).
- 5 Unfortunately, the five-yearly Census does not distinguish between union members and non-members. Hence a direct comparison between union officials and union members in relation to educational qualifications is not possible.
- 6 See Hutson (1983, p. 226) for comment on the situation in the AMWU.

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