

1990

## **Advocate or adversary: The declining membership of young people in unions**

Dave Palmer  
*Edith Cowan University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses\\_hons](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons)



Part of the [Work, Economy and Organizations Commons](#)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Palmer, D. (1990). *Advocate or adversary: The declining membership of young people in unions*.  
[https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses\\_hons/224](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/224)

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.  
[https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses\\_hons/224](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/224)

# Edith Cowan University

## Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author's moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).
- Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

ADVOCATE OR ADVERSARY:

THE DECLINING MEMBERSHIP OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN UNIONS

DAVE PALMER

SCHOOL OF COMMUNITY AND LANGUAGE STUDIES

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF ADVANCED EDUCATION

OCTOBER 1990

(ii)

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

SIGNED: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

**ABSTRACT**

Recent figures show that participation of young workers between the ages of 15-24 in trade unions is by far the lowest of all age groups. Of 1.5 million young workers in this age category only one third are unionised. Not only is membership low but it is also fast declining.

While there has been some discussion and debate over the reasons for this decline, few of the more popular explanations have been comprehensively and critically examined. These explanations include: i) dramatic changes in the world of work over the past twenty years; ii) poor images of unions and a lack of constructive marketing strategies to counter these images; and iii) incompatibility between the interests of young people and unions.

This thesis investigates the question: Why has there been a decline in the numbers of young people joining trade unions in Australia?

The study includes an examination and analysis of documents such as union and government policy statements, union membership statistics, and reports that consider

(iv)

the participation of young people in unions. This secondary research material is supported by data collected in a series of interviews involving twenty young people of various ages, both sexes and from a range of localities, work, educational, social and ethnic backgrounds.

The findings of the dissertation are that, in and of themselves, none of the three explanations or "perspectives" provide an adequate explanation for the decline. Rather the study demonstrates that the incidence of young people's membership in unions cannot be fully understood without first critically examining the social construction of youth and how this impacts upon the trade union activity of young workers.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to first of all acknowledge the contribution of the young people who provided their valued experiences and insights in participating in the study. My time spent with them was of enormous value, and I would encourage union and youth studies researchers to seek out the views of young people themselves if they really want 'expert' knowledge of issues affecting the young.

Extra-ordinary thanks to Rob White for the very thorough job he did of supervising and supporting me throughout the study. I must confess that I didn't expect that I would be given so much time and attention prior to undertaking this study and have been pleasantly surprised. Thank you Dr. Bob.

Thanks are also due to Jo Aberle and Cecily Scutt from the Rage Zone Youth Centre, Coolbellup; Wayne Mordue, from Thornlie Senior High; and my brother Richard for helping to organise the interviews with young people.

I would also like to express my appreciation to John Spoehr, United Trades and Labour Council in South Australia; Tony Cooke, Trades and Labour Council in



(vi)

Western Australia; and Martin Van Tijn, Youth Affairs Division in South Australia, for personally being available to share information, provide photocopies of material and generally filling me in on the state of play in their respective fields.

To Fiona Stewart, Youth Research Centre in Melbourne; Catherine Healy, Youth Affairs Division in Victoria; Barbara Pocock, Labour Studies, South Australian College of Advanced Education and Norman Dufty, Department of Industrial Relation, University of Western Australia, thanks are due for responding to my correspondence and the supplying of relevant and useful material.

Thanks are also extended to Howard Sercombe, Meagan Delahunt and Christina Penn, lecturers in Youth Work Studies, W.A.C.A.E., for their general interest and support throughout the year.

To Chris Brown, who persistently encouraged me to move to Perth and to undertake this year of study, I extend my appreciation.

To Jennie Buchanan, Suzanne Omelczuk and John Litchfield I extend very special thanks. I am indeed fortunate to have three such important friends who provided me with

(vii)

constant encouragement coupled with the preparedness to sit and talk, proof read my material or help to take the seriousness out of it all by participating in some awfully silly behaviour.

Personally I would like to dedicate this piece of work to the late Hugh Main, my grandfather, whose working life serves as a major inspiration and without whom his second Grandson could not have "got such a decent education".

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

DECLARATION	(ii)
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	(iii)
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	(v)
<b><u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u></b>	(viii)

<b>Chapter</b>		<b>Page</b>
<b>1</b>	<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b>-1-</b>
	<b>THE PROBLEM</b>	<b>-2-</b>
	<b>THREE PERSPECTIVES</b>	<b>-7-</b>
	i. Changes in the world of work	<b>-7-</b>
	ii. Unions "image" and marketability	<b>-8-</b>
	iii. Incompatibility of interests	<b>-8-</b>
	<b>AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE</b>	<b>-8-</b>
	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>-9-</b>
	i. Data collection	<b>-9-</b>
	ii. Data analysis	<b>-13-</b>
	iii. Ethical considerations	<b>-15-</b>
<b>2</b>	<b><u>PROBLEMS IN CONCEPTUALISING 'YOUTH'</u></b>	<b>-17-</b>
	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>-19-</b>
	<b>UNDERSTANDING AND DESCRIBING 'YOUTH'</b>	<b>-21-</b>

<b>Chapter</b>		<b>Page</b>
<b>2</b>	<b><u>PROBLEMS IN CONCEPTUALISING 'YOUTH'</u></b>	
	<b>BEYOND AN AGE-BASED UNDERSTANDING OF 'YOUTH'</b>	<b>-24-</b>
	i. Class	-25-
	ii. Gender	-28-
	iii. 'Ethnicity'	-31-
	iv. Locality	-35-
	v. 'Ability'	-38-
	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>-41-</b>
<b>3</b>	<b><u>YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE WORLD OF WORK</u></b>	<b>-45-</b>
	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>-47-</b>
	<b>THE YOUTH LABOUR MARKET</b>	<b>-50-</b>
	i. Full-time work	-51-
	ii. Part-time work	-54-
	iii. Unemployment	-59-
	iv. The informal labour market	-61-
	<b>PRE-ENTRY/PREPARATION FOR THE LABOUR MARKET</b>	<b>-65-</b>
	i. Changes in education and training	-66-
	ii. Training and education for what?	-70-
	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>-75-</b>

<b>Chapter</b>		<b>Page</b>
<b>4</b>	<b><u>UNIONS AND MARKETING</u></b>	<b>-79-</b>
	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>-80-</b>
	<b>CONTEXT - A HISTORY OF THE     IMAGE OF UNIONS</b>	<b>-84-</b>
	<b>THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC IMAGES     OF TRADE UNIONS</b>	<b>-88-</b>
	<b>YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE IMAGE OF     TRADE UNIONS</b>	<b>-94-</b>
	<b>MARKETING UNIONS TO YOUNG     PEOPLE</b>	<b>-102-</b>
	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>-111-</b>
<b>5</b>	<b><u>UNIONS YOUNG PEOPLE'S INTERESTS</u></b>	<b>-114-</b>
	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>-118-</b>
	<b>YOUNG PEOPLE AS VULNERABLE     WORKERS</b>	<b>-119-</b>
	<b>DELIVERING TO YOUNG PEOPLE:     UNION'S PERFORMANCE</b>	<b>-127-</b>
	<b>YOUTH WAGES, INDUSTRY     RESTRUCTURING AND SKILLS     TRAINING</b>	<b>-135-</b>
	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>-145-</b>

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>B CONCLUSION</b>	<b>-148-</b>
<b>THE STUDY</b>	<b>-149-</b>
<b>THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION     OF 'YOUTH'</b>	<b>-151-</b>
<b>RETHINKING THE PROBLEM</b>	<b>-153-</b>
<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS</b>	<b>-155-</b>
 <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	 <b>-157-</b>

**CHAPTER I.**

**INTRODUCTION.**

**THE PROBLEM.**

Over the past eighteen to twenty months social researchers, social policy developers, politicians and service providers have given significant consideration to the plight of young people. The Report of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children, produced by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in February 1989, was perhaps the catalyst for much of this concern. (See Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1989) The Burdekin report, as it became known, set the stage for a range of studies, investigations and reports, (See for example Hartley, 1989; Mass, 1990), into the plight of young people living in poverty "on the street", in a stressful family situation or living alone and unsupported.

Much of the empirical evidence that has become available from these investigations points to a scenario where many young people are experiencing the impact of huge structural changes. This evidence directs attention to an enormous number of homeless young people; the desperate problem of poverty for large numbers of young people and their families; a decline in the number of full-time waged jobs; a decrease in the level of junior wages relative to adult wages; national unemployment levels



still over the 14 percent mark; and school retention rates increasing with little evidence of future work for those currently at school (See Hartley, 1989; Moore, 1988; Ross, 1988; Sweet, 1987; A.B.S. 1989; Eckersley, 1988).

It is within this context that the 1989 September Congress meeting of the Australian Council of Trade Unions was held. Generally concerned with the overall decline in membership and particularly anxious over the numbers of under 25 year olds joining trade unions, the A.C.T.U. Executive ensured that the concerns of the young were a significant item on the Congress agenda.

This was perhaps the first time that young people had been such a major agenda item at an A.C.T.U. Congress. At the congress of 1987 the youth wages issue had certainly been discussed and some moves had been made to begin pushing for the end to what was felt to be a dysfunctional flaw in the industrial relations system.

Young workers' lowly position in the wage fixing system, it was felt, was obviously linked to declining membership. The message was clear for trade unions: either begin to spend resources and energy on young workers or run the risk of losing large numbers of

current and potential members.

Bill Kelty, A.C.T.U. Secretary, in his opening address to the 1989 Congress, even went so far as to suggest that nothing is more threatening to the union movement, as it moves into the 1990s, than the issue of declining membership.

It is not difficult to see why union movement leaders have this concern. The Australian trade union movement has experienced a significant change in membership over the past ten to fifteen years. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, since 1954 the rate of unionisation has fallen by 17% (A.B.S. 1988) - from 51% in 1976 to what many believe is now close to 40% of the total workforce (Williams, 1989, p.30; Robson, 1989, p.1).

An important document distributed at the 1989 Congress, Can Unions Survive?, suggested that, based on current trends, by the year 2000 the union movement could only expect to cover less than a quarter of the workforce (Berry, 1989). When one considers that most of these unionised jobs are full-time and permanent and that many young people are restricted to part-time, casual and informal work it becomes evident that by the year 2000

there will be even fewer unionised young workers.

The same A.B.S. statistics show that membership of young workers between the ages of 15-24 in trade unions is by far the lowest of all age groups (A.B.S. 1988, p. 2). While union membership rates for the total workforce only fell by 6% between 1976 and 1988, membership rates for young people fell by 11% (McDonald, 1989, p. 12). For workers over 25, union membership has dropped by only one percentage point between 1986 and 1988. However during the same period, workers under 25 scored a four percentage point drop. This is nearly twice as severe as that of workers over the age of 25 (A.C.T.U. 1989d, p. 1). Of the 1.5 million young workers in the 15-24 age category only one third are unionised (Harris and Moore, 1988, p. 2). Not only is membership low it is also fast declining (A.C.T.U. 1989d, p. 1).

It is clear from the above that there is good reason for the A.C.T.U. to be concerned over the declining membership of young workers. What is not so clear, however, is the reason or reasons for this phenomenon.

Already a number of responses to the question of why young people are no longer joining unions have emerged. Some have suggested that schools are largely to blame.

Poor media and a lack of positive marketing strategies is another explanation for the problem. Still others have suggested that the self interests of aging union officials is the main obstacle to making unions more accessible to young workers.

In the present context of difficulty for so many young people the necessity for advocates and protection is paramount. At a time when the urgency for full wages, safeguards against poor conditions and exploitation, and the maintenance of income support is so significant for many young people, trade unions do not seem to be able to attract young members. Before policy makers and practitioners can expect to plan effective strategies to ensure that as many young people as possible are adequately supported and protected the question of why they are no longer joining unions needs to be thoroughly researched.

The problem to be researched in this study then is the question of:

- \* **Why, in Australia, has the membership of young people in trade unions been declining?**

### THREE PERSPECTIVES

In an attempt to conceptualise and understand the problem the study will explore three different perspectives or responses to the question of why the trade union membership of young people is declining. Each perspective will be individually examined to establish the degree to which it adequately answers the thesis question.

These three perspectives have been chosen to represent the most popular and frequent responses to the question of the decline in union membership of young people.

The study will systematically demonstrate that, in and of themselves, each of the three perspectives provide an inadequate explanation as to why young people's membership in unions is declining. In brief the three perspectives include:

#### i. Changes in the world of work.

That the numbers of young people joining trade unions are declining as a direct result of changes in the world of work over the past twenty years.

ii. Union "image" and marketability.

That the numbers of young people joining trade unions are declining as a direct result of the negative impression that young people have of trade unions, and poor marketing and recruiting strategies on the part of unions themselves.

iii. Incompatibility of interests.

That the numbers of young people joining trade unions are declining as a direct result of the incompatibility of the interests or needs of young people, and unions and their officials.

AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE

In examination of these three perspectives one key theme will be considered throughout. This theme or hypothesis argues that "youth" as a social category is not the principle determinate of a person's membership in trade unions. Elevating age so that it becomes the key unit of analysis results in the obscuring and subsequent concealing of the impact of social class, gender and 'race' relations, and neglect of the influence of locality and ability, on young people's material

circumstances. If a homogeneous construct of "youth" is used as the theoretical basis of analysis then the genuine experiences and concerns of those young people who may be women, Aborigines, from non-Anglo backgrounds, suffering from 'disabilities', living in isolated areas, working class or unemployed are apt to be ignored.

Therefore the theme running throughout this thesis is:

- \* That the question of young people's membership in trade unions cannot be examined without first considering the impact of class, gender and 'race' relations, and the influence of age, locality and ability, on their position in social and occupational structures.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **i. Data collection**

The study used two methods of data collection.

The first method, that of a document analysis approach was interested in the collection of data from:

- i) union and government youth policy documents

- and statements;
- ii) census and other statistics collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics;
  - iii) print media reporting of union activities;
  - iv) union marketing material;
  - v) reports of statements made by union officials;
  - vi) wage case documents;
  - vii) training programmes and pay levels;
  - viii) labour market research documents; and
  - ix) existing studies on young people and trade unions.

This method generated the majority of the data base and was concerned with the collection and analysis of largely secondary research material.

The second method, that of a small case study of 20 young people aged between 13 and 24, used an open ended questionnaire delivered via an interview technique. An attempt was made to interview young people from diverse backgrounds and with different labour market experiences. By using contacts within senior secondary schools, youth services and the retail and child care industries the case study was able to involve young people from a reasonably wide range of social backgrounds. The



following provides something of an indication of the backgrounds of the young people interviewed:

- \* 9 of the 20 were young women;
- \* 11 of those interviewed were under twenty year olds;
- \* those interviewed lived in 13 different metropolitan suburbs;
- \* when asked about their ethnic background 9 described themselves as Anglo Australian, 2 Greek, 2 Italian, 2 Chinese Malaysian, 2 Aboriginal Australian, 2 English and one from a Mexican background;
- \* 6 were employed full-time, 10 part-time and 2 were unemployed (note: 2 students were not currently working);
- \* the hours worked by these young people ranged from zero to 48+, with the mean time that part-timers worked being just over 10.5 hours per week;
- \* 12 indicated that they considered their work as formal (formal being loosely defined as having tax taken out of their pay), 4 indicated that they were receiving cash payments for their wages, while 9 said that they regularly undertook unpaid work;

- \* wages received varied from \$4.62 to \$13.00 per hour;
- \* 9 were students;
- \* the mean number of years worked was 3.7;
- \* 6 said they had more than one job; and
- \* those interviewed included a cleaner, trainee printer, truck driver, pamphlet deliverer, youthworker, announcer, slaughterer, manager, nurse, footballer, child care worker and sales assistant.

The interviews were directed at collecting data that: indicated why participants were or were not members of trade unions; demonstrated why they thought other young people were not joining unions; and described some of their experiences in the world of work.

All interviews, with one exception, were recorded on tape recorder, and summary notes taken. One of the young women interviewed felt that, because of a condition that affected her speech, a tape recorder would make her overly self-conscious. This interview was recorded using written notes. All of the taped interviews were later transcribed for data analysis.

The case study schedule was piloted prior to the major

study commencing. This provided: an opportunity to determine how long interviews would take; an idea of any potential problems with the questions and technique; and some thoughts on subsequent data analysis procedures.

ii. Data analysis and presentation.

The two methods of data collection took the form of a "triangulation between methods" technique (Cohen & Manion, 1980, p. 213). That is, the case studies were intended to support or negate the analysis of the data found in the document search. This technique served to highlight the contrasting ideas and positions that were found within and between various documents, papers and reports, and the views of the young people interviewed.

Within the document search, data analysis relied on techniques such as: noting patterns and themes; identifying questions and answers consistently raised; looking for contrasting, conflicting and contradictory as well as consistent data; clustering ideas and themes; and noting "invisible" or absent data. The technique of contrasting policy with practice, or rhetoric with action, was central to critical data analysis.

Techniques such as mirroring and paraphrasing - where

throughout the interview participant's responses were restated by the researcher so that any errors in recording or interpretation could be checked by the participant - were used to ensure that the data was collected and interpreted in a fashion that limited misrepresentation. Finally, the pilot interviews were able to provide a means by which data analysis techniques could be adjusted.

To ensure that the data collected from the case studies is presented in a way that is both accurate while respecting the privacy of participants the real names of the young people quoted have been replaced with fictional ones. In some instances the remarks made by young people are best understood in the context of the dialogue or discussion taking place, so the preceding question or comment of the researcher has been included. This should be easily distinguishable from the young person's comments by the initials "D.P." prior to the question. In most cases the material is presented as direct quotes, although at times, due to the difficulty of translating from the spoken to written discourse, the original text may have been slightly altered for the purposing of easier reading. All in all there has been a concerted attempt to represent the young people's comments as accurately as possible.

iii. Ethical considerations

The major ethical considerations that were of particular relevance to the case study were questions of participant informed consent and benefit from participation in the study.

Prior to each interview the researcher spent time briefly outlining the rationale, objectives, limitations and expected outcomes of the study. All participants were clearly informed of their right to refuse to answer any question or decline to be involved at any point, and that at no stage would their identity be revealed. They were also told that if they felt that comments that they had previously made did not truly represent their view then it could be deleted or changed. Each participant was advised of the resource limitations of this study, and was given the option of spending equal time to that spent participating in the interview with the researcher for the purposes of sharing information or raising questions relating to industrial relations and conditions. Some limited information in the form of pamphlets and magazines was also made available to the young people involved.

This study then uses case study interviews with young

people in support of a range of largely secondary research material, such as union and government policy statements; studies of young people and work; and union membership and labour market statistics, to ascertain why, in Australia, the membership of young people in trade unions is declining. The main theme running throughout this research report is that the question of union membership cannot be examined without due regard given to the impact of class, gender and 'race' relations, and the influence of age, locality and ability on the life styles and life chances of young people.

**CHAPTER 2**

**PROBLEMS IN CONCEPTUALISING YOUTH**

D.P.:

Why do you think that not as many young people are joining trade unions as they were a few years ago?

Greg:

It depends really!

Like it makes me think of this program that was on the t.v. the other night called 'Seven Ups' where they interview these little kids from different backgrounds on their lives.

They had these little kids that were going to private schools who said, 'strikes, I think they should set up tribunals where if they want a pay rise they come to the tribunal and if the tribunal says no then that's it, they can't strike'. Whereas the kid that had gone to the lower bracket school said, 'I'm not commenting at the moment cos my mum's on strike.'

It depends really on what position you come from.

(22 year old male registered nurse)



## INTRODUCTION

Whether it be in newspapers, on the television, at universities, in parliament, or from the pulpit, it seems that almost every discipline and profession have had their say about the "youth problem". Sociologists, politicians, teachers, social workers, police officers, psychologists, anthropologists, journalists, Ministers of religion - indeed it appears as if everyone has had an opinion regarding the position and activities of young people in contemporary society.

While much has been said, written and done about 'youth', debates over definition continue and, more importantly, many people still use the term 'youth' as if it means the same to everyone, everywhere and as if this has been the case since the beginning of time.

The reality of course is that the term 'youth' is full of ambiguity. As White (1990, p. 9) says, "The category of 'youth' is by no means universal in conception, nor are these labels used in a consistent way in specific societies and cultures." As Sercombe (1990, p. 2) so simply puts it, "the pursuit of studies in the youth area is faced with a major obstacle. We don't know what youth is." Although many theorists, policy makers and

practitioners may go about their business as though the idea of "youth" is unproblematic, the reality is that the term is relatively new and loaded with problems. Indeed it is significant to note that prior to the industrial revolution the term 'youth' had little if any meaning and before this century social constructs such as "adolescence" and "teenager" had not emerged. In essence the notion that there exists a period of life between childhood and adulthood is a very contemporary one.

Those concerned with understanding or analysing the predicament of young people then are immediately confronted with the question: "what exactly do we mean by the concept 'youth'?" Likewise, when faced with the problem of the declining membership of young workers in trade unions the conceptual problem of defining 'youth' is also encountered.

This chapter will consider the concept of 'youth' and demonstrate that it is fundamentally important that unions and others interested in the problem of membership determine who they are talking about when they contemplate 'young people'.

This chapter will set the scene for the remaining discussions by establishing a theme that needs to be

recognised in analyses of issues of this nature. It will argue that rarely have people clarified who they are talking about when they speak about young people. While there is some evidence that age is influential in determining whether or not a person becomes a member of a union it is more likely that class, gender, and 'ethnic' background are more significant variables, while locality and 'ability' are also important determinants.

#### UNDERSTANDING AND DESCRIBING 'YOUTH'

The idea that all young people are largely "going through a similar phase" and are all the same at a basic developmental level ignores many material realities.

Young women experience "youth" in a very different way to young men. People from industrial working class backgrounds are likely to experience their "youth" in markedly different ways than the sons and daughters of farmers. And of course a young refugee from Cambodia will not enjoy the same "freedom to explore and understand themselves" as a young South Korean tertiary student whose father is paying a large fee for their law degree.

At the same time it is also equally untrue that the term 'youth' is totally meaningless. For example, it is 'real' that the law regulates the activities of 'youth' so that

age determines when one may leave school; take part in sexual activity; participate in paid work; and negotiate legal agreements; and importantly, when one is paid an adult wage. 'Youth' is also used in a meaningful way by media both in the reporting of young people's activities and the promoting of commercial consumption.

It is also important to consider the emergence of 'youth policies', such as the Federal Government's "Priority One" campaign in 1985, which have had direct impact on the situation of all young people. In a discussion of young people's legal status, White argues that state campaigns to modify the behaviour of specific young people have resulted in particular kinds of regulations and controls being placed upon all young people. In other words, legislation has been used as a means of institutionalising the relationship between 'youth' and the rest of society (White, 1990a, p. 137-139).

Age is certainly important in respect to labour market participation. For instance, we might well ask why it is that young people under the age of twenty have little chance of acquiring full-time paid work?

Likewise age impacts on trade union membership. If a person is under twenty years old and compelled to stay on

at school or participate in training programmes then union participation may not seem relevant. There is also some evidence that age is important in determining what kinds of images of trade unions young people are presented with. Certainly from a historical point of view unions have not seemed particularly concerned with the interests of under 20 year olds (See Martin, 1975, p. 57).

Joe and Wendy, 13 and 21 year old student workers, certainly indicated that they thought age was important in determining why they were not a member of a union.

Joe:

Suppose I'm too young. Who knows.

Wendy:

I think it had a bit to do with my age and thinking that I'm a bit young to be a member of a union.

'Youth' as a distinct category, while not possessing intrinsic meaning, does carry importance when considering union membership. Labour laws and notions of junior wages serve to differentiate work on the basis of age and hence

institutionalise young people's industrial position. Classified as 'junior' and therefore not 'real' workers the status of young people is immediately placed in jeopardy. Unions must challenge the notion that young people are less valuable if they are to reverse the decline in membership. Not only does young people's value as workers have implications for the conditions and treatment of young workers but also for the view that young people have of themselves. Until young people regard themselves as 'real' workers they may not see any reason to join unions for 'real' workers.

#### BEYOND AN AGE-BASED UNDERSTANDING OF 'YOUTH'

While it may be true that all young people are affected by the way that 'youth' has been institutionalised by the law, the media and in social policy, the precise way in which they experience this is dependant on their social or family background. Rather than determining life opportunities, age merely influences the immediate life experiences of young people.

At the very least an analysis of youth based on age alone is negligent as it overlooks other key determinants of life style and life chances. It would be very difficult to support the claim that "youth" alone is justification

for the construction of a new underclass (Dorn and South, 1983, p. 10). For as Sercombe (1990, p. 5), Roberts (1983, p. 126), Clarke et al. (1976) and Graycar and Jamrozik (1989, p. 244) all agree, an individual's material situation is not principally set by their age.

### i. Class.

Whilst recognising that all those who sell their labour for a wage can be classified as 'working class' in terms of their relationship to the means of production, at a descriptive level distinctions between different groups of workers, in terms of income and occupation, imply different labour market options. For example, 'social class', as indicated by income and household occupational background of parents, will affect the labour market chances of young people and hence their participation in unions.

Wilson & Wyn (1987, p. 3) argue that the fact that a young person is 19 is not more significant than whether they are a medical student, a word processor operator, a first year mechanic, a member of a gang or unemployed. As Brake (1985, p. 84) argues, class is complicated by age not the other way around. Jamrozik (1988, p. 26) contends that age relations exist within a "broader and

more fundamental class division, and differences in access to economic and social resources based on the class structure are present amongst young people as they are present in any other age group."

As we shall see in the following chapter on the 'World of Work', a person's position in the labour market is enormously important in influencing whether or not they will be able to join a union.

Once a young person is situated within the labour market their class background is likely to influence how they feel about themselves as workers and whether or not they see unions as relevant. For example, one young person's family background, occupational position or income level may predispose them towards union involvement while another's may result in them seeing unions as totally inappropriate or irrelevant. Likewise, as the following quote illustrates, a young person's class background may leave them with a sense of powerlessness and a distinct lack of confidence in their capacity to contribute as a worker and a union member.

For Mary, one of the young women interviewed, being young did not seem to be as important as feeling devalued and as if she was a worker with nothing to offer. While she



did say that there had been opportunities to join unions and did acknowledge the importance of union membership as a way of protecting herself, her social position, or at least her feelings of powerlessness, appeared to be a stumbling block to union membership.

Mary:

It all just feels above me. I'm just a little person. Only people that know about things go into unions.

If you are a shit kicker you feel like a shit kicker. So that's probably why I haven't joined a union. I suppose that's crazy isn't it. Cos I feel like a shit kicker I don't end up joining the union and that makes me more vulnerable heh?

As studies such as those undertaken by Corrigan (1979), Griffin (1985), Willis (1977) and Walker (1988) indicate, growing up 'working class' not only affects the material life chances of young people but also influences the way in which they understand and think of themselves as workers. However 'working class culture' is not homogeneous. For example a young person who is exposed to positive images of the benefits of union membership by parents who have a long history of involvement with

unions is likely to experience their 'working class' socialisation in a very different way from a young person whose parents have been out of work for long periods of time. Similarly, differences in the socialisation patterns of young women and young men from working class backgrounds means that they are also likely to experience class in very different ways. This leads us into a discussion of the impact of gender relations in determining union membership.

### ii Gender

Another significant oversight in the tendency to throw an age based idea of 'youth' to the fore is the seemingly uncritical and "obsessive" fascination with young men (Wallace 1988, p. 2). By and large, most academic and practitioner's considerations of young people's position have focused on the experiences of young men whilst almost totally ignoring the impact of gender relations in determining young people's life chances. McRobbie and Nava (1984, p. ix) describe the concern with young women's experiences in the study of youth as "exhaustively unexplored." While studies of youth over the past twenty years have been extensive they have been far from inclusive and have largely overlooked gender divisions between young women and men.

Frith (1981, p. 7) provides a valuable insight to those interested in studying the participation of young women in trade unions when he examines youth studies in general. He maintains that youth studies have been solely transfixed with young men for two reasons: first, because of the biases of predominantly male researchers, and secondly because of the public visibility of working class young men. Both Brake (1985, p. 183) and Pocock (1988, p. 5-7) suggest that young women have been and will continue to be regarded very differently by union research into young people's position in the union movement.

Young women will be absent from examination largely because of attitudes of researchers to femininity and masculinity and young women's relationship to production. That is, young men are predominantly situated within the public domain while young women are often situated in the private and domestic sphere, which is largely invisible and often seen as unimportant to the labour process. Pocock (1988, 5-6) goes on to argue that one of the groups that distinctly benefits from women's confinement to a narrow range of jobs is unionised men.

Certainly many young women involved in the study saw unions as being either exclusively a man's domain or as

having little or no relevance to them.

Mary:

I see unions as basically for men.

D.P.:

Do you know anyone in unions?

Michelle:

I've got a friend who said they were but that the people who run them are horrible. They said they were sexist and ripped you off.

Whether it be through overt measures to restrict the position of young women to the part-time and casual workforce or through a failure to counter sexist institutions and practices that result in many young women feeling like Mary and other young women interviewed, a failure to challenge the notion of homogenous 'youth' will result in unions further marginalising young women.

iii. 'Ethnicity'

Although not entirely invisible in studies of youth, the material experiences of young Aborigines and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds are rarely considered outside of the guise of special interest groups. Studies have rarely focused on the impact of 'race' relations in the construction of youth. Rather there has been an over-emphasis on criminality and a subtle refusal to acknowledge the impact of 'ethnicity' in the world of work.

Even without extensive theorising and empirical research it is not difficult to see that at 21 years of age Alan Bond, as a rookie entrepreneur, would have experienced his 'youth' in a markedly different way to the young Ruth Bropho. These two young people would have grown up perhaps five years apart but in similar geographical areas. Although Bond likes to describe his apprentice sign-writing youth as "a struggle", it could hardly compare with Bropho's early years in the Swanbourne sandhills. In describing his own and his sister's youth, Robert Bropho (1980, p. 6) says, "we never seen new clothes. All we had to take was handouts. Some days Mum and us kids would go round areas such as Mosman Park, Cottesloe, go to houses, knock on doors, cadge, we'd call

it cadging for old clothes."

This has implications when considering the contribution of young people from either Aboriginal or non-English backgrounds in the labour market. While it is true that Aboriginal young people's experience in the labour market has been one of marginalisation, it is also the case that many young people from non-English speaking backgrounds have come from families that make up much of the "reserve army of labour" (Brake, 1985, p. 116; Collins, 1988, p. 100).

In respect to union membership, highlighting youth at the expense of 'ethnicity' or 'race' relations will invariably result in the failure to recognise both the historical and present reality of overt and covert racism in the trade union movement.

Seik, one of the young people interviewed, provided a number of excellent comments that help to demonstrate the significance of ethnic background to union membership.

Seik:

Unions and the Asian community heh?

Well for a start many people coming from a refugee situation or for that matter any migrating situation have a hard enough time trying to survive.

And like when I went to Sydney I saw a lot of sweatshops with most of the women being Greek, Lebanese or Vietnamese. It reminded me of Indonesia. I don't think that many unions were operating in these situations and I definitely think union's haven't been targeting them with interpreters or people from their community.

Another thing is that unions are often not very popular with people from some Eastern European or Asian backgrounds because they associate unions with communism. Many of the people came to Australia to escape so called communist governments or perhaps from places where the authorities jailed people involved with unions.

Maybe if unions started targeting this unknown or invisible factor in the workforce then they might get stronger. I think that many trade unions are Anglo-centric.

The part that unions have played in perpetuating racism

has been awarded increasing attention since the early 1970s when migrant workers began advocating for their own concerns (See Lever Tracy, 1984). Collins (1988) provides accounts of how the action of officials, individual unions and their peak councils restricted the opportunities of migrants from non-English speaking countries. He argues that largely at the insistence of unions and their predominantly Anglo male membership, discriminatory practices were instituted by legislation. Since their inception Australian unions have been guilty of: refusing membership to workers from non-Anglo backgrounds; only accepting non-Anglo workers who worked in unskilled jobs that could not be filled by Anglo workers; deducting union dues without the consent of non-English speaking workers; and for over fifty years, supporting the 'White Australia Policy' (Collins, 1988, p. 138-141; Wilton and Bosworth, 1984, p. 96). Whether it be through efforts to directly discriminate against migrant workers or a refusal to do anything to question racist practices the history of union's involvement in race relations is far from positive (Castles et. al. 1988, p. 93).

McLeod (1984) and Stevens (1968 and 1974) provide accounts of the way in which Aboriginal workers have been neglected by trade unions. As Stevens (1974, p. 190)



points out this was of special concern up until 1967 when Aborigines were excluded from the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court. Up until as recently as 1968, when they were largely situated in seasonal work in the rural sector and lacked a legal identity under industrial law, Aboriginal workers were especially isolated from trade union activity. It is interesting to note that even though the North Australian Worker's Union was successful in the 1965 equal wages case for the inclusion of Aborigines in the Cattle Station Industry Award it decided not to call any witnesses to refute the claim that the value of Aborigine's work was less than that of other workers (Stevens, 1974, p. 203).

#### iv. Locality

While absent from much of the literature on youth studies, material collected from interviews with the young people points to a further two variables which were denoted as significant in influencing trade union membership. These two variables, which will be described as 'locality' and 'ability', while likely being underpinned by social class, gender, ethnicity and age, were mentioned by a number of young people, and so deserve at least some attention.

In a large state such as Western Australia, with young people living in many communities experiencing enormous geographic isolation, physical location can become a central consideration in determining one's position in the work force (Brown, 1983, p. 7). With increasing use of technology in the agricultural sector and a considerable decline in the demand for labour in rural areas, many young people are faced with the choice of moving to city centres to survive (Lawrence, 1987). In regions such as the Pilbara, young non-Aboriginal male workers are almost exclusively employed in the mining and service sectors where traditionally the workplace has been strongly represented by trade unions. These young workers are likely to experience their 'youth' in stark contrast to a young Aborigine living in a region such as the Kimberley where, thanks to the exploitative practices of land owners and a number of trade unions, the idea of securing paid work is but a distant memory of old people (See Rosser, 1985).

Unfortunately, given the resource limitations of this study, young people living outside of the Perth metropolitan area were not able to be interviewed. Had this been different perhaps the impact of locality could have been considered in greater depth. However, a young man who spent some time in the North of Western Australia

was able to provide some valuable insights into the importance of locality in determining union membership.

Seik:

If you asked these questions up north you might get very different answers. Like in the mining towns there is a feeling of staffies versus workers. I would think that young people in smaller mining towns would be more aware of the importance of unions than young people in the city. They see it every day.

Another young person demonstrates how locality and social class are very much interrelated when she talks about growing up in a suburb with a "bad" reputation.

Mary:

When I was a bit younger Coobie had a real bad reputation. If you went for a job it was accepted practice to say you grew up somewhere else cos people who were from Coolbellup were considered to be unreliable and Coobie was considered to be a hole.

Michelle, a third young person, talked about the problem she once had of living in town which was so small that:

Everyone knows everyone else's business and it wasn't a good idea to go around stirring up trouble with the boss cos word would get around that you were a shit stirrer and then no one would employ you.

v. 'Ability'

Perhaps the most poorly researched influence on a young person's life in respect to questions of 'youth' or trade union membership is that dealing with the question of 'ability' or 'disability'.

With the agenda of current Federal Government economic and social policy being focused on improving the nation's poor economic performance through the creation of a "skilled and more productive workforce" (Commonwealth Government, 1987b), the way 'ability' is constructed is under major review. With much of young people's work being classified as unskilled and many young people being seen in need of "skills formation" the whole question of young people's ability is under examination.

In a society where a person's value is dependent on their "ability" to participate in the production process, increasingly many young people, such as the unemployed, part-time, casual, seasonal and unpaid workers, will be

tagged "unskilled", "unproductive" and hence less able. Unless the social biases ingrained in such terms as "skill" and "productivity" are uncovered young workers, together with women, 'ethnic' and Aboriginal workers, will increasingly find themselves "unskilled" or "incompetent".

This has enormous implications for young people who are currently defined as 'disabled'. Already suffering as a result of a labour market not geared to their requirements, 'disabled' young people are likely to be particularly disadvantaged by such things as award restructuring and 'skills' formation. It is unlikely that young people with disabilities stand much to gain from moves to link 'skill' to the changing needs of industry. Rather the contribution of 'disabled' young people, particularly those with chronic impairments, will be further devalued.

One of the young women interviewed expressed her frustrations about trying to survive in a working environment that seemed neither capable or interested in acknowledging her potential.

Janet:

They think that because they can't understand me that

means I'm dumb and can't do the job properly. I don't think that I'm going to get a good job until my voice gets better... if it gets better.

(Janet is a 16 year old young woman working full-time in a printing factory. Janet suffers from a speech impairment which medical practitioners have unsuccessfully treated for the past 10 months.)

In future, considerably more attention must be devoted to understanding the construction of 'ability' and the needs and experiences of young people who are considered to be 'disabled'. Union policy makers must recognise that 'disability' is not only physical but connected to the changing nature of labour. 'Disabled' young people will be amongst the most vulnerable workers if unions continue to ignore the problems associated with creating "efficient", "flexible" and "productive" workers with little thought for those who may not be seen to have the capacity to "adapt" quickly to the needs of industry.

CONCLUSION.

D.P.:

Do you think that unions do enough for young people?

Michelle:

Not specifically. I mean they are there for people in general, if you can find them. They're not doing anything special for the young people.

Greg:

Well...In my opinion...um young people.. it depends really on which young people you are talking about. Like what class they come from...It would depend on your family background and whether you were from the upper classes or whether you were a worker.

While debates over the primacy of class over gender; ethnicity or 'race' relations over gender; or class in relation to 'race' are complex and beyond the scope of this paper, it is nevertheless reasonable to question the fact that age has been given such a privileged position in youth studies. Trade unions, researchers and others

interested in the question of young people's membership in unions have largely treated 'youth' as if it were a distinct and homogeneous social category. Except in isolated instances where questions of gender and sometimes ethnic background have been awarded a mention, there have been no attempts to consider the impact of social background on young people's declining union membership.

The elevation of age to become the principle means by which membership is determined must be challenged if the question of young people's membership in unions is to be addressed in a way that does not result in superficial analysis of the problem and hence of remedies at the level of practice. For instance, while it may be necessary to examine the differences between the membership and labour force participation rate of under 20 year olds in comparison to 20-25 year olds, it is also equally important to consider which groups of these young people are being affected and in what ways.

While it is true that there are a range of common experiences and interests that most young people share, it is a "patently absurd fiction" that youth is a time of classlessness (Frith, 1984, p. 14). The significance that this has for the topic at hand is that in a sense the



question that is being considered is largely the wrong one. While it is true that increasingly 'youth' is a characteristic that growing numbers of non-unionised workers share, it is not necessarily true that the 'youth' variable is the major contributing factor. Rather, young part-time workers are students or working class first, and 'youth' second. While in the 1990s it may take a little longer to shake off the 'young' part of the equation, the part-time, unemployed or poor side of the label will not be so easy for young workers to elude. As Otto (1982, p. 8) suggests, factors such as gender, class and ethnicity are not something that "one can easily grow out of in the process of becoming an adult." If 'youth' is the major problem then young people need only bide their time and look forward to a full and rewarding future. If age is the major barrier to union membership then unions need only bide their time and wait for young workers to become adult workers.

Rather than their "youth" standing in the way of membership to unions it is more likely that the class status, as further influenced by the gender and 'ethnicity' of young people is restricting their participation in trade unions. As Jamrozik (1988, p. 26) maintains, it is "the new middle class who have succeeded

in securing a position of advantage in the labour market as well as the education system, in social and industrial legislation, and in social security and welfare services provision." If this is so then those young people who are educated, confident and have been able to securely position themselves in the world of work will be amongst those most likely to join unions. On the other hand young people who have had to grow up in a social environment that leaves them with a sense of powerlessness and low self esteem may feel less sure about where they stand in relation to unions and union membership.

It is simply not the case that all young people are no longer joining trade unions. Young men from Anglo Australian family backgrounds who are employed in trades are continuing to join unions and stand to benefit a great deal from union activity. On the other hand young women, young Aborigines, young people from non-Anglo backgrounds and the young unemployed may not be given the same kind of support and attention by the union movement.

**CHAPTER 3**

**YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE WORLD OF WORK**

D.P.:

Why do you think the membership of young people in trade unions is declining?

Mary:

Is there an increase in the number of young unemployed people?

Like my work has been casual, unstable, short bursts or doing part-time work. That sort of work means that you don't have a strong contact with other workers cos you are flitting in and flitting out. Its like you are a new and unknown element, you might not be there for long so why bother.

And like the way you are brought up to feel about getting a job. Like you get that "I'm lucky" feeling if you get a job. If you're feeling lucky about getting a job you're not going to go out and join a union are you?

(23 year old student and part-time worker)

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty years young people living in Australia have had to face broad ranging and dramatic changes in their material circumstances. In 1988, Richard Eckersley of the Commission for the Future wrote about "the seriousness of the crisis facing youth today" in his report, Casualties of Change: The Predicament of Youth in Australia. He spoke of the doubling of the incidence of suicide amongst young people, the increase in the use of illicit drugs and alcohol abuse, the continuing problem of unemployment and the issue of crime amongst the young.

Eckersley is not alone in his description of doom and gloom facing many young people today. As was mentioned in Chapter one, in February 1989 Brian Burdekin, Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commissioner, released one of the decade's most disturbing inquiry reports describing the plight of homeless young people and children (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1989).

Perhaps the most important of these changes for young people has been in the area of participating in paid work. The situation for young people entering the world of work today is almost totally unrecognisable from those

faced by their parents in their transition from school to work. Gone are the many and varied opportunities for the young in securing full-time, permanent jobs in industries that are covered by award wages and trade union protection. In their place are part-time, non-award and casual jobs, an extra one or two years in school, or perhaps a stint in a "skills training" programme.

The first perspective to be explored on the reasons for young people's poor membership in trade unions is one that considers the problem to be best understood by examining the world of work for young people. This perspective maintains that the decline is a direct result of dramatic changes in the world of work over the past twenty years, which have resulted in many young people no longer participating in occupations and industries where unions have been best represented.

Hone and Williams (1989, p. 2), who are supporters of this perspective, maintain that the demand in the 'unskilled' labour of young people, the growth in youth unemployment, the increase in employment of young people in sectors with low unionisation rates, and the escalating numbers of school leavers taking part in part-time employment are all contributing factors to the decline in youth membership of trade unions.

Harris and Moore (1988, p. 2-3) essentially support this explanation when they point to the following as reasons for the decline:

- 1) The employment of young workers in industries that have a low rate of unionisation;
- 2) The casualisation of industries that are labour intensive; and
- 3) The high turnover of young workers.

However this perspective is strongly criticised by the Australian Council of Trade Unions which considers it an inadequate explanation of the problem of declining membership. In its Youth Strategy (A.C.T.U., 1989d) paper released after the 1989 Congress in Sydney, the A.C.T.U. makes it clear that the poor performance of trade unions in attracting young members cannot simply be attributed to the relatively high numbers of part-time, casual and service sector employment trends in the youth labour market. For instance, it points to the declining numbers of young people involved in unions within sectors where trade union involvement has traditionally been strong.

In this chapter the merit of the 'world of work' perspective will be critically evaluated in an attempt to ascertain the degree to which it adequately explains the

decline in the number of young union members. Not only will this mean examining changes to the youth labour market, or how young people participate in work, but also an investigation of changes in preparation for the labour market.

### THE YOUTH LABOUR MARKET

There is no denying that regardless of how it is constructed or conceptualised, today's youth labour market is almost barely recognisable from its condition in the early sixties. Changes have meant that many of the jobs previously available to young people have now fallen by the wayside. Many of these jobs have either disappeared completely or been replaced by part-time, casual or seasonal work (Sweet, 1987; Ross, 1988; & White, 1988a). Today, large numbers of school-leavers and young workers face the prospect of either returning to education or some other form of: training; unemployment; or participation in part-time, casual, low skilled, and non award jobs in industries with little prospect of career mobility.

Despite arguments to the contrary, in 1988 Ross (1988, p. 1) found that overall, statistics supported the conclusion that there was a marked improvement in the



labour market in the five years between 1983 and 1988. There was every indication that official unemployment was down, that the labour force participation rate was up and that a higher percentage of the working population were employed. Unfortunately this good news was not shared by all, rather, "the evidence is that, despite the general improvement in the labour market, teenagers have fared very badly..." (Ross, 1988, p. 1).

In this section of the chapter full-time work, part-time work, unemployment and the informal labour market will be explored in order to more fully ascertain how young people's work has changed.

#### i. Full-time work

In the early 1990s it is uncommon to see a young person move directly from secondary education, or some other form of training, straight into full-time paid employment. Wilson (1989, p. 10) goes so far as to describe school leavers who move directly into the primary labour force with little or no experience of unemployment as being a minority of Australian young people.

Since the 1980s, according to Sweet (1987, p. 1-2), there

has been a consistent and continuous decline in the numbers of teenagers entering the full-time or primary labour force. In 1988, almost 80 percent of all 15-19 year olds were participating in full-time employment. By 1988 this figure had tumbled to just over 31%. This is supported by Freeland (1987, p. 7), who says that the overall teenage share of full-time jobs fell from 14.1% in 1988 to 7.8% in 1988.

According to the A.C.T.U. (1987, p. 89), between 1988 and 1988, 110 000 female and 80 000 male full-time jobs have been lost. Although both groups experienced a decline, the difference in situations for young teenage women and men also demands attention. The decline for young men has been rather more sporadic, with sharp falls late in the 1980s, stability during the early 1970s, rises in the late 70s followed by another fall in the mid 1980s. On the other hand, the decline for young women has been more constant, except for a particularly heavy drop in the mid 1980s. Similarly, Aboriginal young people have fared extra poorly with respect to the decline in the number of full-time jobs available. While remembering that 15-19 year old Aborigines have the poorest employment participation rate of all Aborigines under 55, in the ten years between 1971 to 1981 the employment population ratio for all Aborigines dropped from 42% to 35.7%

compared to a 0.1% drop amongst Non Aboriginal Australians (Miller, 1985, p. 46 & 48).

While it is true that some of this has occurred in times of economic recession it is also important to recognise that the "decline in full-time employment has occurred both in times of respectable economic growth and in periods of recession" (Sweet, 1987, p. 21).

The decline in the number of full-time jobs available to young people is important when considering the question of union membership as it is within the primary labour market that unions have been most able to recruit members. As Sloan and Wooden (cited in Lewis, 1990, p. 32) say, "the pattern across all age groups is for the rate of unionisation to increase with longer duration of employment."

For Seik and Mary, union membership and full-time and permanent work were considered synonymous.

Seik:

I think that when I get a job, a permanent job, a job that I like to stay in for a couple of years, I will join a union.

Mary:

Probably when I'm working more constantly I will join a union.

~~ii - Part-time work.~~

A close examination shows that many young people who would have previously positioned themselves in the full-time labour market have now moved into part-time jobs. In 1988, only one in every fifteen jobs held by a young person was part-time. By 1974 this had risen to one in eight, in 1978 one in five and in 1988 the figure was one in three. In population terms this represents a jump from 43 000 in 1988, to 93 000 in 1978 through to 202 300 in 1988 (Sweet, 1987, p. 3-4). All in all this represents an increase in the number of part-time jobs taken on by young people of 355.5 percent from August 1968 to August 1988 (Wilson et. al. 1987).

A study by Coventry et. al. (1984) found that young people's access to part-time employment is very much dependant upon their age, gender, and ethnic and social backgrounds. In other words the pressure to move into part-time work has not been experienced in the same way by all groups of people. For example, Lewis (1990, p. 1)

says that most part-time jobs "have been taken up by married women with children, and by students who are combining work with full-time education." Later in her report of trends in part-time work Lewis (1990, p. 9) shows how young men and young women are affected differently by the casualisation of work. She contrasts young women's and young men's involvement in part-time work by pointing to the fact that almost a third of all males compared to only 11% of young women under the age of 19 are employed part-time.

The problem of part-time work is further compounded when one considers the kinds of part-time jobs that many young people have to endure. According to one of the Commonwealth Government's policy booklets, "Aboriginal employment that does exist is concentrated in lower skilled and lower paying jobs that are frequently casual, temporary or seasonal jobs" (Commonwealth of Australia, 1987a, p. 1).

Not only is much of the work part-time but many young people are often concentrated in the "dead end" of the labour market. Wilson et. al. (1987, p.2) comment that:

This circumstance is no accident: the full-time and part-time labour markets for youth are distinctly

segmented. The part-time jobs tend to be low-paid with few prospects and little security. They also tend to be concentrated in relatively few industries.

The problem of finding full-time paid work for young people is further complicated by the fact that employers are increasingly looking to employ students, rather than the unemployed in the part-time jobs that are available (White, 1990a, p. 137). Four out of five part time jobs for 15 to 17 year olds are taken up by students (Wilson et. al. 1987. p. 2). In 1986, according to Sweet (1987, p.5), "59.5% of all teenage part-time workers were school students." Sweet goes on to make the point that there seems to be a deliberate attempt on the part of employers to select students for their part-time work. He argues that student's willingness to tolerate casual, deskilled and poorly paid jobs, and flexible hours in occupations with few career prospects makes them more attractive to employers keen to get what they can out of the reserve pool of labour (Sweet, 1987, p. 19).

For many of these young people joining a union is not a major consideration for a number of reasons. For example, for those already struggling on a limited income, the thought of contributing money to a trade union is not a priority. Two of the young women interviewed stressed

the value of the extra few dollars a week required for union membership. As Susan commented:

I'm not being scummy but two dollars fifty goes a long way these days. A loaf of bread or a couple of litres of milk.

Being unsure about the future of a part-time job was also mentioned as a reason why young people didn't consider union membership relevant.

Danni:

I started off doing relief work or casual and just doing a few days here and there. I've never really thought to join unions, probably cos I don't know how long I'm going to stay in this job.

(18 year old part-time child care worker)

D.P.:

How come you haven't joined the union?

Mary:

Cos with this job I didn't think that it would go on for as long as it did.

Seik:

Because I haven't been working long enough. Most of the jobs I have had have been part-time, casual and that sort of thing. You don't see the relevance of unions, you are just there for the money.

The idea that he would be regularly changing jobs caused Robert to question the value of union membership.

Robert:

I won't work here for the rest of my life. There's no point in contributing to Joe Bloggs who is going to be here in twenty years time. He can pay for his own benefits.

Finally the opportunity to join unions is greatly reduced because part-time workers are often not considered part of the mainstream workforce. Part-time and casual workers may not be included in staff meetings where union



information may be handed out. They may not be considered permanent and therefore not worthy of the extra attention necessary for recruitment. Or they may be easily hidden by employers not sympathetic to unions.

### iii. Unemployment

There is perhaps no single matter of greater concern to those charged with the responsibility of dealing with the affairs of young people than the issue of unemployment.

Unfortunately, although there have been literally hundreds of studies and thousands of statements made that allude to the problem of unemployment, the topic is at times a difficult one to quantify. For example, in Great Britain over the last decade there have been some 24 adjustments made to how unemployment statistics are collected (Murphy, 1989, p. 11). In an Information Paper produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1987b) it was shown that there are at least six distinct means by which teenage unemployment can be measured. This demonstrates that unemployment rates are dependant on who is calculating them and for what purpose.

Regardless of how unemployment is measured there is no denying that it exists and does so especially among

teenagers. Depending on the locality, anywhere from between 14% to 30% of young people available for work are unemployed. Not only is high youth unemployment a problem but the length of unemployment experienced by young people has increased in recent years (Wilson. 1989, p. 14).

Although "Youth of all ethnicities (including Aboriginal Australians) and both genders have carried the brunt of unemployment" (Lever-Tracey, 1988, p. 225), it is apparent that amongst the young there are distinct groups who are facing more difficulties than others. Young Aboriginal people are the most likely social group to be unemployed (Miller, 1987, p. 67). The unemployment rate for teenage young women is 2% higher than teenage young men as not only do young women have to compete with their teenage counterparts but also an increasing number of older women wanting (or needing) to re-enter the job market (Wilson et. al. 1987, p. 2). Dwyer et. al. (1984, p. 21 & 22) confirm this and also show how it is the young working class, migrants without the ability to communicate in English, Aborigines, and those living in remote areas who make up the largest proportion of the unemployed. Clearly "the probability of unemployment does not fall equally on all young people" (Murphy, 1988, p. 11).

This has profound implications when considering young people's membership in unions. For a start this means that particular groups of young people are more likely to be locked out of joining unions simply because they are not working (Jamrozik, 1988, p. 26). Unless more unions adopt the practice of signing up the unemployed as members or retaining retrenched workers, many young people can never expect to have the opportunity of joining unions. The psychological impact of unemployment is also bound to influence young people if they finally do find work. Many young people who have suffered long periods of unemployment and feel fortunate to have found work will be reluctant to question or challenge the practices of employers or management let alone think about joining a union.

#### iv. The informal labour market

Paramount in any discussion of how the world of work influences union membership is an exploration of the increase in the practice of employing workers "on the quiet" by using the 'cash economy' or utilising the services of volunteer or unpaid workers.

Not all "work" that young people are involved in is situated within the formal, official and waged sectors of

the labour market. From the studies that have been undertaken (See Baldock, 1988 & 1990; White, 1989), there is every indication that a significant portion of work occurs outside the formal and official labour market. This work may be situated within the context of either the informal paid, informal unpaid or criminal economies.

White (1988a, p. 137) and Pahl (cited in Horne, 1987, p.5) counter the often held view that young people who are unemployed and receiving government benefits are more likely to become involved in "unofficial paid work". They argue that as job opportunities for young people close off in the formal sectors of the economy so too does the chance of being involved in informal paid work.

However White (1989, p. 143-147) and Polk & Tait (1989, p. 21-23) go on to argue that this is not the case with the other two segments of the informal economy, namely domestic and voluntary forms of work, and the criminal economy.

In discussing the extra problems faced by young women who fail to find a place in the primary labour force, White (1989, p. 143) points out that:

Not only are young women subject to much greater

parental control over their spare time, but there are major pressures upon them to conform to specific notions regarding 'feminine' behaviour and to perform 'womanly duties' associated with domestic labour.

Locked out of paid work and hence income, many young women face further pressures to "prove their value" or "legitimise their parent's support" (White, 1989, p. 144). As Game and Pringle (1983, p. 125) make clear, the pressure is on for unemployed women to spend extra hours performing domestic duties to "make up" for their inability to contribute financially to the family. Since household work is difficult to measure or put a value on, young women are often expected to spend a massive amount of time cleaning, washing and cooking for the rest of the family. Certainly at this point in time few trade unions have the capacity to directly provide protection for these young people.

The pressure to contribute to the family business was also expressed by a number of the young people involved in the interviews. Unable to find work elsewhere they were expected to "help out around the cafe" or "give a hand in the shop." Not only was this not considered to be "real work" but the young people involved felt that they had no grounds to complain about conditions and certainly

no grounds to join a union.

D.P.:

So why aren't you a member of a union now?

Michelle:

Because I am working for my mum and whether she is ripping me off or not I wouldn't go to a union and try and sort it out.

(18 year old working 'informally' while receiving unemployment benefits)

Squeezed out of full-time or part-time work in the formal economy many young people are being forced to compete for jobs in either the informal waged, informal non-waged or criminal economies. It is here where young people are most susceptible to abuse and vulnerable to exploitation. At the same time it is in these jobs that trade union protection is almost non-existent.

PRE-ENTRY/PREPARATION FOR THE LABOUR MARKET

While it seems that most studies of young people and work tend to limit themselves to an examination of the youth labour market this is not all that deserves consideration. Not only have there been substantial changes in the way that work for young people has been organised, there have also been considerable changes in the way that young people have been organised for work. This has particular significance when considering the union and youth membership question.

The pre-entry process helps to shape the potential young worker and hence the potential young union member. Rather than learning working culture in the workplace itself, increasingly young people are being taught how to be workers in the "work laboratories" of schools and T.A.F.E. colleges.

It seems that for many the cure-all answer to the concerns of unemployment and declining full-time work lie in the creation of more education and training places for the young. Certainly for most Commonwealth and State Governments, Youth Policy is synonymous with Employment, Education and Training, (without too much emphasis on full-time employment). Moves by the Federal Government to

abolish unemployment benefits for under eighteen year olds and tightening of the conditions and guidelines for receipt of unemployment benefits have given thousands of young people no other option but to stay on at school or enter some form of organised training programme.

It is particularly important to consider in more detail this approach to "Youth Policy" as it has not only been fostered by State and Federal Governments but also largely promoted and supported by the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

In order to understand the effect that pre-entry or preparation for the labour market has on union membership this section of the chapter will focus on changes in education and training, the emphasis on skills formation, and the content of education and training.

#### i. Changes in education and training

Not surprisingly the last twenty years have seen major changes occur in the process of educating young people in Australia. Although it may be argued that there have always been debates over the relationship between schooling and work, over the past two decades the debate has been particularly intense. When considering the



reasons for phenomena such as youth unemployment and poor national economic performance the education system has been the first to be blamed.

Sweet (1987, p. 7-11) describes the participation of young people in secondary education as the "flip side" of the youth labour market. He goes on to describe the trends in school participation and shows how there has been an increase of as high as 300% for seventeen year olds between 1966 and 1985. In the mid 1980s almost all fifteen year olds and most sixteen year olds, two thirds of all seventeen year old, and 40% of seventeen and eighteen year olds were involved in education.

It is not only schools which have been under pressure to offer more vocational options to young people. Because of the difficulties that schools have in providing relevant and useful job preparation for young people due to the tightening in funding, staff allocations and continuing changes in the labour market, it has made more sense to bolster "training" opportunities on the job or within the Technical and Further Education sector.

The Australian Traineeship Scheme, established in 1985, was an attempt to provide an on-the-job training alternative to apprenticeships. The scheme, which is

designed to provide training both on-the-job and two days per week in a T.A.F.E. setting, was established as a part of the Hawke Government's "Priority One" Youth strategy.

The scheme has had problems since the first months of its inception, not least of which is its failure to achieve projected positions, particularly within the private sector. Other problems with the scheme have been outlined as follows:

- \* the lack of 'real' jobs when the young person finishes the programme;
- \* the forcing of young people into the secondary labour force, thereby reducing their chances of entering the primary labour force;
- \* the shifting of young people from one category to another without changing the 'real' job situation;
- \* that payments for training undercut youth and adult wages and lower living standards of young people;
- \* that very little protection for the trainee is built into such programmes; and
- \* that there is inadequate monitoring of programmes to ensure that the on-the-job

training component is in fact offered (Youthworker, 1986, 22-23).

White (1990a, p. 62) suggests that the programme may encounter further problems when he cites the experiences of similar schemes that have been established in Britain. Young people involved in training programmes in Britain, he says, have been exploited by employers who use the schemes as a means of legitimately paying low wages. He goes on to describe how trainee programmes have threatened the apprenticeship system and how young women and some ethnic groups have been further disadvantaged by training schemes' failure to provide equal opportunities. Furthermore, some employers have used training positions to recruit cheap labour rather than create permanent full-time positions and have used them for "vetting" and "creaming" employees.

With the growth in the incidence of young people staying on at school for longer periods of time or participating in training programmes that don't guarantee permanent jobs, unions will find it increasingly difficult to adequately recruit and cover young people.

ii. Training and education for what?

Although often spoken in terms of opportunities for young people, the use of terms such as training and skill development must be more closely examined if changes in the job preparation sector are to be understood fully. What is essential to consider is: what is the content of training and what is it that young people are being trained for?

Both Australia Reconstructed (A.C.T.U./T.D.C. 1987) and Skills for Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 1987b), two of the most influential policy reports in the shaping of employment, education and training policy in the past five years, are reluctant to provide definitions of what they mean by concepts such as "skill", "education" and "training".

Rather than being clear, tangible and necessarily positive for all workers, Braverman (1974) argues that the notion of skill is socially constructed. The process by which a job is defined as a "skilled" one involves a struggle by workers for the recognition of their work. Phillips and Taylor (cited in Pocock, 1988, p.11) support this idea when they argue that there is little evidence that a connection exists between the ability of workers

and the classification of jobs as skilled or unskilled. White (1988b, p. 1) argues that much of the rhetoric on skills formation tends to emphasise education and training in "industrial terms rather than taking into account the social content of skills, education and training."

Moore (1984, p. 64), in a discussion of the role of "world of work" curriculum in British schooling, argues that this kind of education has little to do with work at all. Rather, he suggests that it is used as a way of controlling "reluctant attenders." Willis (1977, 1984) supports the idea that vocational curriculum is an effective means of controlling students who are not interested in being at school any longer. By learning how to be compliant in the classroom, argues Moore (1984, p.90), young people are learning 'skills' that will be valuable to future employers and/or government officials administering benefits and allowances. Gleeson (1986), White (1990a), Finn (1987) and Cohen (1984) all agree that it is not so much the imparting of skills, rather the instilling of values and attitudes, such as flexibility, adaptability and compliancy, which vocational training is interested in. 'Skills' and 'abilities' such as "being able to talk to strangers", "politeness", "helpfulness", "loyalty" and "knowing how

to talk to different people in different circumstances" are valuable components of much vocational curriculum. As White (1990a, p. 94) points out, many of these so called 'skills' are in fact based on appearance and attitude towards work.

Cohen (1984, p. 115) provides an interesting account of visits to a number of vocational training programmes for young working class people in South London. He describes the content of the training as mostly consisting of the teaching of "transferable skills" such as sweeping floors, cleaning up, running errands, lending a hand and "making themselves look sharp". He suggests that "a whole variety of techniques of impression management .. seemed to belong more to a finishing school for the children of some rising middle class."

Definitions of 'skill' aside for a moment, the reality is that the demand for highly 'skilled' jobs is dwindling. As White (1990, p. 75) argues, adopting a policy direction that insists on pushing a 'skills formation' bent ignores that:

There may be a shortage of skilled workers in some areas, but this should not obscure the fact that there is an overall lack of demand for significant

numbers of skilled workers in the Australian workforce, much less other kinds of paid work. Education is therefore primarily and actively being sold as job preparation in circumstances which are inappropriate to such a strategy.

Lewis (1990, p. 20-33), Ross (1988), and Sweet (1987) provide reports on changes in the labour market which indicate that the number of positions that require high 'skill' and expertise on the part of the young worker are declining and that the number of jobs where menial, repetitious and boring "skills" are required is increasing. Toohey (1990, p.11) contributes a number of examples of the kinds of 'skills' that are required of young workers. He says:

Being a maid in a five star tourist hotel basically requires being able to 'access' guests rooms with a vacuum cleaner and a new set of sheets.

Many 'data entry' jobs require only the basic ability to punch a key board repeatedly.

Regardless of the objectives of educating and training a more "intelligent" Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 1987b), the future for many young people has changed

little. Armed with more credentials and having had an extra one or two years of schooling, young people are still being forced to compete for employment when they eventually leave school. Not only do they have to compete but as Sweet (1987, p. 18) points out, young people are choosing to stay at school so that they can "enter essentially the same sort of jobs that they would have obtained had they left one or two years earlier."

Without jobs at the end of their education little is likely to change for many young people. On the surface, youth unemployment figures may look marginally less disturbing as a number of percentage points shift into education and training statistics. Unfortunately this is not likely to change the real life situation of those young people who will eventually be looking for meaningful paid work at the conclusion of their education or training programme. Without real opportunities in terms of jobs, vocational education and training is at best postponing the crisis and at worst producing disenfranchised and frustrated young people.

More importantly for unions, with its increased emphasis on flexibility and adaptability, 'skills training' is more likely to create compliant workers rather than inform young workers of the obligation of employers and



encourage the value of union membership. Young people will not be learning 'skills' that enable them to organise or defend their rights as workers or teach them the value of collective struggles to defend wages and conditions. Rather they are more likely to learn the skills of conformity and obedience (White, 1990a).

### **CONCLUSION**

There can be no denying that changes in the world of work have had an enormous impact on declining membership in unions. Being locked out of the primary labour force, where full-time and unionised jobs are situated, many young people are forced into work where there is little industrial protection. The transient nature of much of the work that young people undertake makes it very difficult for unions to establish contact let alone recruit young workers. As one young man interviewed remarked:

**Robert:**

One of the reasons why young people don't join unions is that they don't stay in jobs for all that long. Why should they join the union if they are only going to be in a job for six months or so?

Certainly it is arguable whether trade unions, as they have traditionally operated, will ever have the capacity to represent young workers who find themselves in casual and transitional work. As Seik put it:

Like work has changed and unions haven't. They haven't changed fast enough to get to the areas where young people are working.

Likewise for young people who are increasingly being thrown into unemployment, and into the non-waged informal and criminal economies, trade unions do not seem to be a realistic vehicle to secure a fair deal. History shows that, apart from a few isolated periods prior to the last world war, trade unions have had a poor, if almost non-existent, record when it comes to representing the unemployed, Aboriginal Australians and women in the domestic sector.

It would be foolish to disregard the major implications that changes to the world of work have on the decline of union membership simply by pointing to a number of occupations which are strong in union representation but have failed to have unions recruit young members (A.C.T.U. 1989, p. 2). Likewise it is important to acknowledge that fear of unemployment, a lack of secure

job prospects, poor income, and isolation from others within the labour market mean that many young people don't have the confidence to "hunt down" unions. In times of economic recession, when they are competing for fewer and fewer jobs, young workers are bound to be more compliant and reluctant to consider their industrial rights. How confident can we expect the young person who has been unemployed for eighteen months to feel about phoning up a Government Authority or Trades and Labour Council to find out which union covers their occupation?

New forms of vocational education and training are having equally significant effects on the decline. Evidence suggests that secondary schools are doing very little to counter the decline (Palmer, 1988; Nolan & Hagen, 1989). There is also little evidence that training programmes are encouraging union membership. Rather, the content of these programmes seem to be more predisposed to persuading young people to tolerate their poor situation and accept the demands of employers without question.

The very major changes in the world of work over the past twenty years have certainly influenced the decline of young people's membership in unions. There can be no ignoring that the continued existence of such large

numbers of unemployed in the youth labour market has had profound effects on union membership. Equally what cannot be ignored is the effect of changes in the way that young people are being prepared for work. Young people who have not been able to obtain full-time and stable work or have had to spend perhaps two years in a 'skills training' or vocationally orientated education programme are unlikely to have joining a union as a high priority.

**CHAPTER 4**

**UNIONS AND MARKETING**

D.P.:

Did you ever meet anyone from the union?

Robert:

No, I never saw anyone. I think that is a bit of a problem from my point of view. Like in Australia people want to get to know you before they are willing to be involved in doing something with them. And its hard to trust someone if they aren't there when you first walk into a job and then never come to see or speak to you.

(23 year old part-time field officer.)

## **INTRODUCTION**

The latest A.C.T.U. youth policy paper, released after the 1989 Congress (A.C.T.U. 1989d, p. 2), provides another critique of the labour market perspective discussed in chapter three. The paper argues that the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that the increased concentration of young people in the secondary labour force is not the only phenomenon that is affecting union membership. It uses these figures to

demonstrate that within part-time jobs where traditionally unions have not concentrated a great deal of attention, young people's participation in unions is declining much faster than adults. It points to the decline in membership among young workers in sectors, such as manufacturing, where unions have not been able to recruit those young workers who have gained employment. In describing these trends it seems that the A.C.T.U. is apportioning much of the blame for declining membership on the inability of unions to move out into the workplace and sign up teenage workers.

Accordingly, the second perspective to be explored in this thesis is one which sees the problem of the decline in membership largely as one of an inability to sell the value of union membership. In other words, young people are no longer joining unions because they know little of the benefits of unionism or because they have negative images of the performance of unions. The answer therefore lies in unions themselves "pulling up their socks" and developing more sophisticated ways of "marketing" unionism to young people.

Both the 1987 and 1989 A.C.T.U. Congress policy papers strongly emphasised the importance of planned, integrated and concerted recruitment initiatives aimed at young

workers. In 1987 the A.C.T.U. Congress youth policy paper announced its first national youth recruitment campaign and outlined a four point "recruitment and development" plan for young workers. The principles behind this plan included a commitment to:

- i) encourage young trade unionists to participate more in all aspects of union activity;
- ii) participate in the development of promotional material to be used in schools and other education and training institutions;
- iii) encourage unions to provide more education and training in the history of the labour movement and the role and function of unions; and
- iv) encourage young unionists to undertake courses run by the Trade Union Training Authority (A.C.T.U. 1987, p. 85).

The 1989 Congress followed by adopting a seven point recruitment initiative developed by a national conference of young workers and unions. These initiatives included:

- i) the production of entertaining video material focusing on the "modern day role and value of trade unions";
- ii) the negotiation of discounts for young union



- members with companies catering for youth markets;
- iii) the employing of youth officers in peak union bodies;
  - iv) the production of union information kits for young workers;
  - v) the focus on youth and the use of media in National Recruitment Week;
  - vi) the establishment of a study of young people's high occupational injury rate; and
  - v) the planning of a national trade union conference on youth unemployment (A.C.T.U. 1989d, p. 9).

In the introduction to the 1989-1990 A.C.T.U. Youth Book (1989c, p. 5), the Secretary of the A.C.T.U., Bill Kelty, claimed that young people were the number one agenda item at the recent A.C.T.U. Congress in Sydney. Kelty clearly places emphasis on a desire to cater to the needs of young workers in an attempt to promote an image of openness and accessibility. The article, headlined, "Young workers have got the trade union movement worried," also included an invitation for young people to provide feedback to the A.C.T.U. over the decline in membership. The article concluded with:

We want to know more about what you want. Do you have any ideas? What can we do to meet your needs? If there are issues that you feel strongly about, write to me at A.C.T.U. House. (A.C.T.U. 1989c, p. 5)

Though A.C.T.U. leaders would probably deny that they see the problem as purely one of poor marketing, in terms of action this perspective has been very popular.

In order to examine the relevance of a perspective that focuses attention on marketing unionism to young workers this chapter will first direct its attention towards the problems experienced by unions when trying to portray a positive image to the general public. From here the effect of media propaganda on the attitudes and opinions of young people will be explored so that recent examples of marketing techniques can be better appreciated.

Finally the content and style of marketing and associated education attempts will be surveyed in order to see whether those being targeted are in fact the groups that are no longer becoming union members.

### CONTEXT - A HISTORY OF THE IMAGE OF TRADE UNIONS

Before examining public perceptions and images of trade unions it is first important to understand the context in

which these images or conceptions of unions are situated. This is best done by taking a look at the circumstances in which unions have developed and how they have been portrayed in the past.

Australian unions first surfaced amongst 'skilled' tradesmen in the early 1800s. These very small groups of workers were not so much interested in advancing their wages and conditions as establishing benefit societies to defend against the likelihood of illness and unemployment (Plowman & Deery, 1985, p. 200). However, by the 1830s, workers who were more interested in protecting and improving their conditions had formed union organisations (Hutson, 1966, p. 26).

The economic and political conditions, (such as the gold boom, scarce labour and moderately high wages), associated with the 1850s further encouraged the establishment of what we now understand as trade unions. In a short number of years the building trade unions were successful in achieving the eight hour day for their members (Hagan, 1983, p. 31), and by the turn of the century there were almost two hundred unions covering just under 100 000 members. In terms of the whole labour force a little over nine percent of all paid workers were covered by trade unions (Martin, 1975,

p. 1). By the time the union-initiated labour parties had won their first elections in 1910, the trade union movement had developed many of the characteristics that we now recognise today (Hagan, 1977, p. 21).

From the outset the growth of the union movement presented businesses and management with problems. Employers committed to the objective of maximising productivity and profitability found their power challenged. Although limited in their capacity to fundamentally overthrow capital, unions certainly posed a threat to profits. It was this threat that motivated the mobilisation of organised campaigns to destroy the credibility, and hence power base, of unions.

Even though there had always existed a conflict between the interests of workers and employers, Carey (1987, p. 16) argues that it was not until directly after the second world war that capital was able to mount successful campaigns to challenge the growing labour movement. The way forward was led by American Corporate leaders.

Impressed with the success of propaganda campaigns used by both the Allies and Germans during the Second World War, American business began to explore how similar

tactics could be used to help relieve them of some of their industrial problems. In the early 1950s Bernays (cited in Carey, 1987, p.17), who was the nephew of Sigmund Freud, wrote that, "the great public could now be harnessed to their (business') cause as it had been harnessed during the war to the national cause, and the same methods would do the job." Corporations, first in the United States and then later throughout the western world, began setting aside financial resources for the purpose of influencing public opinion. The expertise of academics and social scientists were utilised to devise "scientific" methods to break strikes and develop "public relations" strategies to influence the values and attitudes of both unionists and others within the community. This was particularly timely for the business community in America as efforts to contest unions through means such as violence and picket line encounters were proving costly and did not always guarantee success.

Carey (1987, p. 12-40) provides a useful account of the evolution of propaganda used both inside and outside of corporations as an effective means of influencing public opinion. He describes how this propaganda sought to popularise the free market system in the public's view; to target potential threats to corporate interests; make

sure these were labelled and associated with menace and risk to the general public; and weaken the links between unions and their members.

Carey (1987, p. 13) uses a 1958 quote from Professor Key, who in the 1950s was one of Harvard University's key industrial relations "experts", to illustrate the rationale behind the use of corporate motivated propaganda:

Businessmen are a small minority highly vulnerable to political attack...They .... have to depend on something other than their votes. They have to use their wits - and their money - to generate a public opinion that acquiesces in the enjoyment by business of its status in the economic order ... (and) continuing propaganda calculated to shape public attitudes favourably toward the business system.

### THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC IMAGES OF TRADE UNIONS

Like Carey's account of the situation in the United States the reporting of industrial relations in Australia is far from objective. As we will discover later in this chapter there are a number of means by which the general public obtains knowledge and information about unions and

their activities other than through the media. Although some of these vehicles for disseminating ideas are reasonably popular, one cannot ignore the influence of the popular media.

It has been argued, and indeed supported by studies both within Australia and internationally, that there exists no other institution that so negatively affects the image of trade unionism than the mass media. (See Davis, 1982; Bilton et al, 1981; Carey, 1987; McColl, 1983; Windshuttle, 1984; White, 1984) These studies indicate that the media is the main source of information and influence for many people in respect of trade unions.

Martin (1975, p.137) suggests that these images are both critical and sceptical of unions. He says:

There are two widely held beliefs concerning Australian trade unions. One is that they are exceptionally aggressive. The other is that they are exceptionally powerful. (Martin, 1975, p. 137)

While there is often support for a limited role for trade unions to play, research supports the notion that generally the Australian public feels unions are: i) too powerful; ii) too aggressive; and iii) are involved in

too many strikes. However some care should be taken when considering studies on images and opinions about unions as there has been little data provided in the last five years which centre on this question.

When asked to respond to the question, "Do you think trade unions in Australia have too much power?" 58% of unionists and 73% of non unionists in one study, and 70% of all respondents in another study, answered yes (Rawson & Merrill, 1980, p. 482; Davis, 1982, p. 29). In Rawson and Merrill's study, 76% of unionists and 87% of non-unionists believed that there were too many strikes. A 1988 A.C.T.U. commissioned survey on worker's attitudes to unions (cited in Robson, 1989, p. 2) found that the two most strongly felt opinions were that union officials did what they liked and that the A.C.T.U. was just another arm of government.

Both Davis (1982, p. 15) and Bilton et al (1981, p. 550) preface their studies on the impact of the media on union image and activities by discussing a vital characteristic of the media. That is, the media are themselves big business. They are either directly owned by or immediately linked to some of Australia's and the world's largest corporations. Where media concerns are not necessarily owned by large businesses they are almost



totally dependant upon them for advertising and other financing.

Given the association between big business and mass media it would be most unusual to expect that popular media would adopt perspectives or views that are overly critical of large capitalist enterprises and their ideals (Bilton et al, 1981, p. 550). Certainly, takeovers and mergers in the electronic and printed media, where increasingly fewer and fewer enterprises are in control, do little to encourage the diversity of opinion and pluralism that is so often portrayed as being at the base of media reporting.

However this is not to suggest some kind of planned conspiracy by individually powerful characters who have decided to wage a war against trade unionism. The creation of news, for example, is not necessarily based upon collusions between corporate editors who take decisions to wage campaigns against the labour movement within the confines of their secluded board room meetings. Rather it is more likely that institutional or built-in bias results from the fundamental relations between the interests of big business and the labour movement (McColl, 1983, p. 463).

For example, cadet journalists are taught early that their job is to "discover dramatic and sensational stories" which are immediately interesting to the public. Exciting and perhaps even melodramatic stories sell newspapers. This leaves plenty of scope in the reporting of industrial conflicts. "Union threats", "rows over conditions", "exports in jeopardy", unions which are "continually demanding, rejecting, protesting, and urging strikes," and "angry, militant, hardliners" are all headlines that promise thrilling reading.

This sensationalism is rarely balanced. According to McColl (1983, p.444), there is ample evidence, especially from overseas research, that "the content of western media does contain a bias or one sided emphasis which inevitably apportion blame for industrial conflict to the union or labour side." McColl's (1983, p.447-460) case studies provide useful examples of how media constructs, and more importantly, legitimates particular actions. So often the performance of business in industrial disputes is applauded and given far more time, space and air-play while the achievements of unionists are all but ignored and presented as inappropriate, unreasonable or irresponsible (See White, 1984).

A number of the comments made by participants in the

survey illustrate the influence that the media can have on their views and opinions.

Rick:

I think sometimes they cause a lot of disruption in the workplace. Sometimes they cause strikes when it is not needed. Instead of talking about something they always take extreme action.

(22 year old part-time sales assistant and student)

Wendy:

You only really hear about them in times of grievances. The only part that gets highlighted is when they go on strike, like it's all their fault.

It's like they are the cause of strikes and that they could hold the country to ransom.

(21 year old student and part-time worker)

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE IMAGE OF TRADE UNIONS

Not surprisingly, available evidence suggests that young people know little about unions. Although it is often expected that young people internalise the negative images that are presented to them available evidence suggests that many young people, particularly under 20 year olds, have yet to be exposed to much anti-union propaganda.

Most recent studies that have focused on what young people know about trade unions draw reasonably similar conclusions. They maintain that a vast majority of young people are poorly, if at all, informed about such topics as trade union purposes, roles, functions, organisation, capacity and membership. Although most of these studies have solely involved students and hence are far from definitive, they still give an indication of many young people's knowledge base and awareness of unions. The data collected for this study adds credence to the conclusion that young people know little about unions as it was able to survey not only students but young people from a range of 'work' backgrounds.

Cupper (1980, p. 36-53) focused on the knowledge and attitudes of senior technical students towards trade

unions in her study. The results of the study demonstrated that the students were largely ignorant of the topic, with over 50% unable to state what the initials A.C.T.U. stood for and under 40% able to name one union.

A study involving 104 senior secondary students in eight high schools in South Australia found even less evidence of knowledge about trade unions (Palmer, 1988). When asked to individually describe what a trade union is, only 42% of those surveyed were able to provide at least some kind of response. This 42% of students compared with 48% who clearly did not know and 9% who were not sure enough to say what a trade union is. Perhaps the most recent study of student-workers (Nolan & Hagen, 1989, p. 29-40), supports the findings of the previous studies. In both schools surveyed, less than 15% of those who completed the survey questionnaire were able to correctly answer the question, "What do unions do?". Astonishingly, 42% of students in one school and 32% at the other school involved in the survey did not even know whether they were a member of a trade union. Those students who indicated that they were members of a union were rarely able to accurately name the union.

While the case study interviews were not designed to provide statistical data on young people's knowledge base a number of common themes ran throughout the discussions. Two of those interviewed, both under twenty year olds and working casually, clearly had absolutely no idea what unions are.

D.P.:

Are you a member of a union?

Fiona:

Like what?

(13 year old part-time cleaner)

Joe:

Um, No. I wouldn't know really. What's a union?

(13 year old part-time pamphlet deliverer)

With one exception all of the young people interviewed expressed that they were unclear and dubious about their knowledge of unions. Only a young man who had been a

union delegate was confident in his knowledge of his own union's affairs although he did admit that he knew virtually nothing about other unions. Even a young man who had completed a university degree in economics said that he "didn't know a huge amount." All of the young people who were union members felt that they could benefit from more information about unions and their role. Not only did many of the young women feel that they knew little about unions but they felt that the whole subject was largely inaccessible and outside of their comprehension.

Mary:

It all just feels above me. I'm just a little person. Only people that know about things go into union offices. It's all a bit mystical.

Generally speaking, most of the young people, even union members, expressed a great deal of confusion and claimed that the topic of trade unions was rarely, if ever, talked about.

Greg:

I get confused. We get a little sheet with the names

of different union committees and groups and I can't remember what they are about most of the time.

George:

Its just not something that you sit around and talk about is it? Like when you're out and having a drink with a friend you don't sit down and talk about unions do you? Not unless you want to get laughed at.

(17 year old unemployed footballer)

Although not focusing on trade unions exclusively, a number of studies of occupational health and safety, working conditions and industrial relations in general, provide some useful data on young people's knowledge base. A study in Melbourne in 1987 which was concerned with young women's knowledge of occupational health (Youth Policy Development Council, 1987, p.51), came to the conclusion that those surveyed had little knowledge of the whole area of industrial relations. A Western Australian study of students, not necessarily workers, likewise found that only 2% felt they had "a lot of knowledge" of industrial relations (Donovan Research, 1989, p. 21). A study of student workers in two Melbourne High Schools in 1989 found that 96% of those surveyed did



not know whether they were covered by an award and a little under half understood the state's worker's compensation scheme (Job Watch, 1989, p. 16-17).

Little is known about where young people's perceptions of unions come from although Cupper (1980), Palmer (1988) and anecdotal accounts for this study provide small but consistent indications. Comments made by participants in the survey demonstrate that the media is a major source of gaining information on unions for young people.

Greg:

Unions... the images I used to have of unions was from the telly. The B.L.F. and people fighting and all these people getting hot headed and going out on strikes. They weren't good images of unions.

Michelle:

Most people's way of getting current events is by reading the paper or watching the news. Its not like it encourages them to join unions in the first place.... And there is no other information available.

One of the young men interviewed said that he had consulted with his father prior to deciding not to join a union while another five acknowledged that their attitudes and views had been strongly shaped by their family.

Cupper's study revealed that 49.1% of students involved in her survey reported newspapers and television as the source that they most relied on. 24.8% gained knowledge from teachers and 17% from parents. This compares favourably with Palmer's consultation where 45% of students listed television and newspapers, 14% schools and 11% stated that family and friends first informed them about trade unions. Interestingly, only 3% of those surveyed by Palmer said that they gained first hand knowledge of unions in the work place itself.

This is consistent with Nolan and Hagen's (1989, p.40) claim that union members do not have a high profile in workplaces where school students work. This is interesting given that a study of adult workers, although perhaps not particularly current, found that as high as 25% of those surveyed listed the workplace as their source of information (Davis, 1982, p. 30). Surely until more is known about where young people, especially young workers who are not students, gain knowledge about

unions, attempts at marketing may prove to be ill directed and premature.

There is also some evidence that social background influences young people's knowledge of unions. Although not specifically centring on young people and somewhat dated, Davis' study in 1977 provides an indication that knowledge and attitudes towards unions is correlated with one's social background. The Davis study, involving the distribution of questionnaires in one exclusive, one middle class and one industrial suburb, found evidence to support the hypothesis that one's "background", chiefly occupation and suburb, is an important factor in determining attitudes towards unions (Davis, 1982, p. 26-30).

The results of Palmer's study (Palmer, 1988, p.22), indicate that student's knowledge of unions is correlated to the locality of the school which they attend. 80% and 73% of students in the two schools situated in industrial suburbs responded that they were unable to describe what a union was while 18% and 16% of students from the two schools situated in suburbs where most parents are employed in lower and middle management occupations responded in the same way.

While it has sometimes been suggested that student's knowledge and image of trade unions is negative and reflects anti-union sentiment, up to now this has yet to be supported by the evidence. Anecdotal evidence of anti-union feeling of young people is provided by a union resources officer in Burchell (1989, p.27), and Nolan and Hagen (1989, p.40), suggest that "negative attitudes..(towards unions) slightly increase at year 12". On the other hand, as Palmer (1988, p. 14) found, young people's knowledge of unions is so minimal that they are largely unaware of the negative images that are often circulated. While data collected from the case studies certainly indicate that there are young people with anti-union views most of the young participants were far from unequivocal in their convictions. It is also possible that young people growing up in the period since the Accord between the A.L.P and the A.C.T.U., where the incidence of striking and other forms of industrial disputes have dropped considerably, have not been subjected to large scale anti-union media campaigns.

### MARKETING UNIONS TO YOUNG PEOPLE

There can be no arguing with the A.C.T.U. (1989d, p. 9) that there needs to be more information on unions available to young people. With the exception of one

young person, all participants in this study mentioned something about information, education or encouraging a more positive image of unions as being of importance in determining why many young people are not joining unions.

Mary makes a useful point about the lack of information available to young workers when she talks about her extensive experience in the world of work.

D.P.:

Do you think that unions do enough for young people?

Mary:

No. Because if I have no idea about them and yet I have had twelve jobs then there is something not working properly. Even at the basic level of information. What they are supposed to be doing.

Other young people understandably felt that as members of unions they deserved more attention, even if this meant only being better informed of the unions' activities.

Danni:

I mean I have been there twelve months and I haven't even seen these great unions that have been promising pay rises. Working there for twelve months I should know more from them.

Susan:

They should have someone coming into work and telling you what the union is all about. Like they did with the superannuation. The unions didn't do that, not while I was there.

Like you know that you are getting money taken out of your wage but you don't know where it goes and what your union dues entitle you to.

(19 year old unemployed student)

Ralph:

All we seem to get from being in the union is a membership card and, in a good year, maybe five

little newsletters that might have a couple of interesting things in them.

(22 year old full-time child care worker)

Phillip:

I wouldn't know how to approach them or anything like that. You pay them but you never know what they were about.

(21 year old unemployed person)

Burchell (1989, p. 29), while generally supporting moves by the A.C.T.U. to use television advertising to gain good publicity, questions the wisdom of the campaign undertaken in late 1989. He says of the advertising campaign, "what struck me was the disparity between the arguments of the A.C.T.U. about who we're not successfully reaching out to at present, and the style and content of the ads" (Burchell, 1989, p. 29).

Certainly the style of the latest A.C.T.U. promotional magazines, Over2U and AboutU is more of the calibre of a Dolly or Cosmopolitan magazine. While glossy and colourful appearance and short, attention getting

headlines may appeal to a particular group of young people, many would not find the wordiness, emphasis on individual success, and use of "clean-cut" and "happy" young people accessible or relevant to their experiences. For those young people who have not benefitted from the school system, have problems reading or retaining information or simply don't relate to the language and cultural style of "90s pop culture", these kinds of magazines may have little meaning.

Of even more concern is the title of one of the publications Over2U. Perhaps intended as a motivation for young people to get involved in work and union activity it could easily portray the message that it is up to young people to improve their own conditions.

The content of Over2U is also clearly disposed towards presenting a picture of consensus. With many of the young people featuring in the magazine being employed by the six sponsors of the magazine it is little surprise that there is little mention of large scale exploitation of young workers. Rather the subject is treated as if it is isolated and exceptional and that the few incidences that do occur can be quickly "negotiated" by interceding union officials. Other than "six bad points to part-time and casual work", which are hidden away in one corner of



the magazine, the problems associated with part-time and casual work are not considered. The smiling faces and comments by young people, such as, "it was soothing to know the hours are always there and that they were flexible enough to allow her to study for her senior certificate" (A.C.T.U. 1989b, p. 9), portray an uncritical and positive image of the casualisation of work for young people.

The kinds of young people targeted by marketers is something that is rarely mentioned apart from Laverty (in Burchell, 1989, p. 29). For example, seldom are unemployed young people the subject of attention in any of the material that has been produced. Young people involved in the informal or illegal economy are totally ignored. No mention is ever made of young people who may have been exploited as a result of their involvement in apprenticeships or traineeships, let alone the plight of homeless young people struggling on grossly inadequate income while they are participating in government run training schemes.

On the other hand no one technique or style of marketing can hope to reach every population group of young people. But alternatives like the booklet produced by the United Trades and Labour Council in South Australia are perhaps

more suited to communication with many of the young people who currently are out of the reach of unions. The booklet, Working: Real Life Experiences (U.T.L.C., 1988), developed by a special project team that consulted with a range of young people, uses a comic/dialogue style which is more likely to reach young people who may not have been as "successful" as the achievers featured in Over2U and About U. Techniques such as the targeting of material to young women and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds, although only currently being mooted by the United Trades and Labour Council in South Australia, are bound to capture audiences that otherwise would not be reached.

Some marketing strategies may even prove to be counter productive. Carey (1987, p. 42) is particularly critical of the strategy on the part of the labour movement of using television and mass media to affect public perceptions. Carey argues that it is unrealistic to expect that the labour movement will ever have the necessary contacts, influence and resources to compete with big business for media space and time. In support of this argument Carey uses the United States as a case in point. The use of "issue advertising" or "advocacy advertising" by the American business community has become a hundred million dollar industry. The trade union

movement, he maintains, does not have the power or resources to counter this practice. Carey (1987, p. 42) says of the buying of press or television time that:

it is a particularly stupid practice..... for it gives encouragement, and indeed a moral right, to those who oppose labour policies and have the necessary resources to take competing ad space. (Carey, 1987, p. 42)

Anna Booth (in Burchell, 1989, p. 29) discusses the limitations of using mass media campaigns to challenge or change perceptions. She uses successful campaigns such as the "Do the right thing" litter campaign as examples. Television marketing, she argues, is based upon mass exposure over extended periods of time. The "Do the right thing" litter campaign has been in existence for over ten years and is just beginning to influence people's behaviour. On the other hand the A.C.T.U. campaign in late 1989 could only last for three weeks given the enormous budget involved.

Another issue worthy of consideration is that business has the resources and the motivation to become involved in other areas of marketing. During the author's research in 1988 it became clear, when interviewing teachers and

school administrators who were responsible for "world of work" education, that local employers had a far greater capacity to provide resources to schools. Local businesses were all too happy to offer work experience placements to students, come in and speak to classes about "work", and even donate equipment and other resources to the school, hence influencing the attitudes of students with their "industrial relations" content. Local employer associations were extremely well organised to cater to the needs of teachers who were struggling to offer education that was relevant to students facing a rapidly changing labour market. Unions on the other hand were facing tighter economic times with membership declines and financial restraints, and had no where near the time or resources. For example there was not even a list or register of union officials who could regularly speak to students in schools at the time of the 1988 study. On more than the odd occasion teachers expressed their admiration for employers while being extremely critical of the failure of unions to provide them with anything.

## **CONCLUSION**

The second perspective, namely that the decline in young members of unions is due to the union movement's failure to promote themselves, has a number of flaws. While there can be no denying that there have been problems with the dissemination of information to both potential and current young members, apportioning all or most of the blame on poor marketing fails to adequately explain membership decline in a number of ways. For a start rarely is the content of union marketing discussed. Much of the material currently being used by unions to recruit young people is not being targeted at the groups who are not represented. It would not be inaccurate to suggest that marketing and the mass media are seen as one and the same. Techniques for promoting union images that involve alternatives to expensive media campaigns rarely seem to have been considered.

While the trade union movement's commitment to recruitment and education campaigns is clear, what is not so clear is how this may be best achieved, the techniques that should be used, what will be the content of such a campaign and who specifically will be targeted. While the A.C.T.U. (1989d, p. 9), principally through its youth committee, has outlined a sketchy campaign to "market"

itself to young people, little preparation seems apparent when considering the substance of such a campaign.

What kind of image? Which young people? What will be included and what will be omitted? These are fundamental questions that seem to have been ignored. The perspective that places marketing and developing positive images as the major reason for the decline in membership of young people deserves much more attention.

The lack of research initiated by unions considering what young people know about unions and how they can better be informed may be another indication of the trade union movement's real commitment to marketing as a strategy. Whilst little is known about students, almost nothing is currently known about the attitudes and opinions of young workers who are not students. Without first understanding the experiences of non-unionised young people and developing clear ideas about the content of marketing to these young people unions have little chance of successfully promoting themselves and halting the decline in membership.

While it is true that trade unions must be constantly working towards improving their public image they must also recognise the huge constraints and limitations that

they are faced with. Marketing campaigns that are aimed at the general population of young people are too nebulous. As chapter two argued the category of 'youth' is problematic and becomes particularly questionable when considering public campaigns aimed at recruiting union members.

The strategies of using expensive media techniques and producing glossy magazines without defining content and target groups does not constitute effective or exhaustive marketing. At a time when resources are so limited for unions, they could do well to further examine the view that poor 'marketing' is the principle explanation for the decline in membership of young people. For it is certainly the case that large numbers of young people will not join unions regardless of what 'marketing' strategies are used.

**CHAPTER 5**

**UNIONS AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S INTERESTS**



Michelle:

When I was working for ... (a fast food restaurant) it cost me money out of every pay packet to join the union. At first when I started working there I asked not to be in the union. I would have rather had the money and taken what came to me. But I didn't get any choice so I had to be in the union... And I never saw anyone from the union but I didn't really need one and wouldn't have used one anyway. I thought it was stupid and later when I found out about that big scam between the unions and the people who own the fast food place I felt really ripped off.

(18 year old ex-part-time worker in a fast food chain)

D.P.:

Do you think that it's a worry that young people aren't joining unions to the same degree that they used to?

Susan:

Not really. Cos they don't do anything for you.

Unless you are working for the government and your boss doesn't have to take money out of his own pocket to pay you....If you've got the boss getting up you its really bloody hard.

(An 18 year old young women who has worked in the fashion industry for the past three years)

## **INTRODUCTION**

A popular explanation for the reluctance of large numbers of young people to join unions has been the inability of unions to indicate, through their actions, a commitment to young people's interests. Certainly the A.C.T.U. leadership has been trying to make it clear to young workers, through publications such as the 1989-90 Youth Book, that they are concerned. In the introduction to this publication, Bill Kelty maintains that a campaign to "remove junior wages rates from awards" is the principle way to show that unions are "worried about the lack of involvement of young people in unions" (Kelty in A.C.T.U. 1989c, p. 5).

In this chapter the question of "interests" will be explored. In theory trade unions are about the protection of worker's interests, about "associations of workers who

have joined together to protect each other" (Robertson, et al. n.d. p. 1). Or as the A.C.T.U. put it in one of their promotional magazines directed at young people, "A union is you and your workmates" (A.C.T.U. 1989b, p. 8).

While one can not deny that trade unions have provided and continue to provide protection and advocacy for thousands of young people it is pertinent to consider to what extent and which young people unions have been able to best support. Is it the case that many young people are literally voting with their union dues and refusing to join because they are dissatisfied with the performance of unions? Have unions been protecting the interests of some young workers while largely ignoring other groups? These are the kinds of questions that will be considered as this chapter focuses on the theme: Are unions protecting the interests of young workers?

There are certainly indications that some unions have not been doing the right thing by their young members. For example, a recent case heard in the Western Australian Industrial Magistrates Court found that young workers had been underpaid since 1984 because of a deal made between the Liquor Trades Union and fast food employers. The court ruled that the pay rates in the

agreement, which were 10% lower than those outlined in the award covering the industry, were invalid (Saw & Menegola, 1990, p. 5). This demonstrates that some unions have been far from responsible as advocates of young workers.

The chapter will begin by providing a description of the world of paid work for young people. What is it like to be under twenty five and working or trying to find work? What are some of the experiences of young workers and what are their needs, issues and interests?

Many young people, perhaps unable to find work or trying to survive on a meagre junior wage, are faced with numerous difficulties in the world of work. Many are not only faced with the problem of being young, hence vulnerable by virtue of their lack of experience and knowledge of industrial rights and responsibilities, but are also discriminated and exploited because of their gender or ethnic background.

Also included in this chapter will be a review of the history of union accomplishments as these pertain to young people and young workers. This is provided to present a context in which to assess the current performance of unions. The last section of the chapter

will take special interest in current debates about the union movement's role in pressing for the abolition of junior wages, award restructuring and "skills" training for young people.

As has been the case throughout this thesis, the importance of understanding the nature of "youth" will be a major theme. Both historically and currently, particular social groups of young people have been better served by their unions than others. Without due consideration to the social impact of a young person's gender, ethnicity, locality, ability and social background it is not possible to ascertain precisely whether or not the interests of unions and young people are compatible.

### YOUNG PEOPLE AS VULNERABLE WORKERS

Although generalisations are risky, (the major thesis of this piece of work points to the dangers of a lack of specificity), there is little doubt that young workers are amongst those who are most vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, sexual harassment, discrimination and industrial accidents. While the situation for some workers may have improved over the past fifteen to twenty years, young women, Aborigines and migrants have yet to

enjoy the full fruits of "improvements in the standard of living."

While there has been little documented evidence of the magnitude of the problem of exploitation of young workers there is evidence that some sections of the youth labour force are in a remarkably unprotected and vulnerable position.

It is also clear that changes in the youth labour market have resulted in more young people being driven into accepting part-time and casual work where "jobs tend to be low-paid with few prospects and little security" (Wilson et al., 1987, p. 2). Labour market opportunities have become more limited for many young people, thus making them more vulnerable to greater abuses in the labour process. Among the most vulnerable include:

- i) the long term unemployed who are significantly made up of "working class young people, girls, migrants without English speaking skill, Aborigines and those living in geographically remote areas" (Dwyer et al. 1984. p. 7-27);
- ii) student workers who make up the greater proportion of young part-time and casual workers;

- iii) young women;
- iv) young Aborigines;
- v) young people from families where English is not the predominate language spoken;
- vi) young people living in isolated areas; and
- vii) young people with physical or other disabilities.

Reeders (1988, p. 153) describes some of the work undertaken within the fast food industry, one of the chief areas of employment for under twenty year olds. He sees this work as resembling "that of third world 'export processing' plants where there are few actual rights and little protection by unions."

Because of their ignorance of rights and tenuous hold on jobs many young people are at risk of being sacked for unfair, ambiguous or trivial reasons. However because they are already casual workers, many need not be sacked, rather "their services may no longer be required." This occurs perhaps after they reach an age at which employers are compelled to pay higher wages or maybe after young workers have "proven" that they are not as "flexible", or not as prepared to tolerate unfair treatment as their employer might like them to be (Ashenden, 1990, p. 21).

In the study already referred to by Reeder (1988, p. 147) a number of young people describe their experiences of mistreatment at work. One young worker said: "If they (the management) didn't like you...they wouldn't give you shifts. Yeah it was all just threatening with shifts." Dalziel (1989, p. 10), describes the experience of "Julie", a student worker:

She got her first job in a chicken take away through the CES, the staff of which duly informed her of the rates of pay and the provision for penalty rates for certain working hours. When she started working however her boss told her that 'instead of deducting tax we will give you \$4 an hour and an extra \$1 an hour for penalty rates.

A number of young people involved in the interviews for this study provide personal accounts of exploitation.

D.P.:

Have you ever had problems with employers or bosses?

Susan:

Yeh heaps!



I've been sacked without redundancy pay. Sexually harassed in two jobs. Told not to take lunch breaks. Ordered to work overtime for free. I had to dress in clothes that the shop sold but not given discount or a clothing allowance. Promised raises for doing extra things that never came through.

Michelle:

\*\*\*\*\* was my first job and I found out later that there was a big scam going on where they were taking my money that wasn't rightfully theirs.

D.P.:

Did you ever have problems with your boss, did they ever treat you in a way that you thought was unreasonable?

David:

They did that a couple of times. The head mechanic would say "come on its time to start again" when I had only had twenty minutes for lunch. Sometimes at the end of the day I'd want to go on time and he'd

say I could only if we'd finished the work. But most days I wouldn't mind staying back and finishing.

D.P.: Did you sometimes ask to go early?

David:

No not early just on time. Usually we wouldn't get off till 20 past, half past five, sometimes you didn't finish till seven, eight o'clock.

D.P.: Did you ever get paid overtime?

David:

No. I only got paid overtime once and that was from 6 till 7, but from 5 till 6 he didn't pay me.

I just sometimes wanted to go on time.

(Young 18 year old man, ex apprentice mechanic)

Of all the issues that impact on young people in the workplace the problem of occupational health and safety is perhaps the most profound and disturbing. For even the most experienced of workers the workplace is often far from safe. Each year more than 500 workers are killed and 300 000 injured while performing their jobs. Of these,

15-24 year olds, more particularly workers under 22, were the most likely age group to get injured while at work (A.C.T.U. 1989a, p. 35-36). Kelty in a discussion of young workers stated that they "are at least twice as likely to be injured in a the workplace accident than older workers" (Kelty in A.C.T.U. 1989a, p. 5). According to Nolan and Hagen 24% of the student workers involved in their survey said that they had been injured at work (Nolan and Hagen, 1989, p. 35).

Evidence collected from various groups of young people indicates that many have suffered harassment and discrimination not only due to their age and inexperience, but because of their social background.

Michelle:

And then I worked at \*\*\*\*\* and sexually harassed really horribly. I got pushed around, squirted by the hose and not allowed to go outside and everything so I went to the Equal Rights Commission. This lady came to speak to the manager and the kitchen hands had to apologise. I worked the next shift and they all laughed at me. That taught me that standing up for sexual harassment is a huge waste of time.

Both in this and other similar studies, such as Nolan and Hagen (1989) and Ashenden (1990), claims by many young women of bosses who's "hands were a bit wandery" and who "constantly make rude remarks about my breasts and my body" are far from isolated.

The issue of ethnicity and how this is reflected in different work practices is also an important consideration. Reeders (1988, p. 147), provides an account of a young junior manager in a fast food restaurant who talks of the explicit practice of employing Vietnamese young people because they were prepared to accept abuse.

The powerlessness felt by young workers also contributes to their vulnerability in the workplace. Feeling isolated and not knowing how to deal with being exploited was a theme running through many of the interviews with the young people involved in this project. When asked what they would do if they had problems at work many responded with statements like: "I don't know.... maybe talk to the boss about it"; "just try and avoid them and keep out of their way"; "there's nothing you can do...its not really a worthwhile thing... there's no point in making waves"; "I'd tell em where to go, then just walk off"; "if it was really pissing me off I'd probably leave... its a bad

attitude but that's just the way I am."

In a recent survey of over 2000 young people in Perth, of the 62 that responded on the question of working conditions only 5 said they would look to unions for support regarding their concerns at work (Durack and Kelly, 1990, p. 52). In Nolan and Hagen's study of the 40% of students that were able to satisfactorily answer the question "What would you do if you were underpaid?" most said they would choose their boss and only 11% indicated they would seek out their union (Nolan and Hagen, 1989, p. 31).

This supports the claim that young people know little about their rights, unions, their status under legislation or avenues for recourse and points to a distinct lack of protection and cause for concern for those in younger age groups.

#### **DELIVERING TO YOUNG PEOPLE: UNION'S PERFORMANCE**

D.P.:

Do you think that there have been enough opportunities to participate in unions? I know that this might be a hard question to answer because you

haven't been involved much before.

Mary:

That answers it in a way heh!

Young people's vulnerability in the workplace is compounded by a poor history of representation by trade unions. Although such things as awards, health and safety legislation and the basic wage flow through to non-unionised workers, a young person's capacity to benefit from gains that unions are able to acquire are limited if they are not members. Certainly direct representation in the work place, financial lending services, legal advice and other benefits are generally only available to members of unions.

According to Martin (1975, p. 57), in the early 1970s a typical union member was not an Aborigine, not a woman, not young and not from a non-English speaking background. The latest Australian Bureau of Statistics data on union membership indicates that little has changed (A.B.S. 1988, p. 5-8). In fact, as far as representation by trade unions goes, the only social group that has fared worse than young people are Aboriginal Australians. Considering that close to 65% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islanders are aged 25 or less (A.B.S. 1987a, p. 4-6), Aboriginal young people are most unlikely to be directly protected by trade unions.

The capacity of trade unions to extend their support to young workers in general is diminishing particularly in many part-time, casual and 'semi or un-skilled' industries. Not only are young workers who participate in formal jobs missing out on union representation, there is also evidence of the growing practice, amongst many young people, of accepting work in the informal and illegal labour markets (See Mattera, 1985 and White, 1988a). The current willingness of trade union's to directly represent the interests of young workers within this sector is almost non-existent.

In Chapter One the incidence of the decline in young people's membership was described more fully. However even where young people have been members, often the support offered by unions has been far from abundant.

In essence A.C.T.U. policy on young people in the world of work has differed little from Federal Government youth policy since 1983. Through the Accord and tripartite negotiations with Governments and the business sector, the union movement has largely supported the education

and training emphasis in youth policy adopted by Federal and State Labour Governments.

Since 1983, through the Prices and Incomes Accord struck between the Australian Labour Party and the A.C.T.U., the labour movement has certainly been able to increase its involvement in the development of national economic and social policy. However this increased involvement in national policy development has not resulted in meeting the Accord's initial objectives of re-establishing full-employment and the negotiation for improvements in the social and economic conditions of Australia's working population.

In fact, as Stillwell (1986), Carney (1988), and White (1990a) show, since the Accord was first struck wage levels have fallen, unemployment levels have largely remained unchanged, profits for non-farm capital have increased and the social wage has not improved. In short, the Prices and Incomes Accord has become little more than a Wages Accord where workers have gained least from the "consensus" decision making process of the Hawke Government.

The report of the joint A.C.T.U./Trade Development Council mission team to Europe provided a blueprint for



economic development which included a far greater commitment to educating and training a more "adaptable and skilled labour market" (A.C.T.U./T.D.C. 1987, p. 126).

The following examples provide an indication of how the A.C.T.U. has largely supported Federal Government education and training policy direction:

- \* The failure of the A.C.T.U., in 1985, to seriously question the Government over its proposal to introduce a traineeship programme;
- \* The endorsement, in October 1986, of the Federal Government policy decision which recommended that 15-19 year old young people should not receive benefits unless they were actively involved in voluntary work, education or training (White, 1990a, p. 25);
- \* The resolution, by the Labor Government, to drop unemployment benefits for under eighteen year olds and replace them with a \$25 a week "job search" allowance in May 1987 without debate or criticism from the A.C.T.U.; and
- \* the A.C.T.U. recommendation, in 1987, for measures that "guarantee, within a five year period, that all 16-24 year olds have access to

full-time education specific vocational training or productive employment" (A.C.T.U./T.D.C. 1987, p. 125).

On the surface these policy initiatives seem to give "positive messages" and "incentives" (Commonwealth of Australia, 1987c, p. 6) to young people to involve themselves in education or training programmes. However, divorced from job creation and full employment strategies this kind of policy direction will serve to lock many young people into an occupational dead end.

Certainly documentation that has emerged from the last three or four A.C.T.U. National Congresses pushes training and education to the foreground. In 1987 over half of its youth policy paper consisted of an "integrated employment, education and training strategy for young people" (A.C.T.U. 1987). In its 1989 Congress paper, although the focus of concern seemed to be the abolition of youth wages, the A.C.T.U. was interested in a campaign to convert junior wages into an equivalent training wage.

For specific groups of young people the situation which emerges from the study of past union activity is even more disconcerting.

The Australian trade union movement's record of providing protection for young Aborigines has been nothing less than disgraceful. For example racial prescription was not removed from the constitution of the Australian Workers Union's constitution until 1971. This proved very disadvantageous for young Aborigines given that this union held jurisdiction over the largest proportion of industries where Aborigines were employed in paid work (Stevens, 1980, p. 122). The situation has changed little for young Aborigines, according to the Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs. The report maintains that the role of unions in restricting entry in occupations particularly disadvantages young Aborigines (Miller, 1985, p. 93).

Pocock (1988, p. 6) claims that much union activity erects obstacles for young women and argues that it is groups of workers other than young women that benefit most from unionism. She comments that:

Many unions over many years have pursued the interests of male workers against the interests of women (who have sometimes been their own members). Many unions continue to do so, substituting the weapon of outright prohibition of women from certain jobs for age restrictions on entry to certain skilled

jobs, or 'protective' regulations.....Many of these unions have colluded with employers to encourage government regulations and workplace practices which exclude or disadvantage women.

Despite some attempts to improve their communication to non-English speaking young workers Collins (1988, p. 147) argues that, "there is still a long way to go before unions can claim to have adequately responded to the needs of their migrant members."

However it is not true that all groups of young people have been neglected by unions. As Burgmann (1990, p. 16) is quick to remind us, young people, (mainly English speaking young men), working in militant occupations such as the building, metal and oil industries, have experienced and will continue to benefit from improved wages and conditions. Burgmann goes on to predict that young men in these industries will experience dramatic gains under current award restructuring plans. However these gains will be offset by the gradual deterioration of conditions for most young women and young men in weaker occupations (Burgmann, 1990, p. 16).

YOUTH WAGES, INDUSTRY RESTRUCTURING AND SKILLS TRAINING

D.P.:

What do you think are the main benefits of joining unions for young people?

Mary:

So they don't get done over hopefully. Cos wages for young people are such a grey area that we seem to get the shit piled on before other workers. And yet we are still workers who are contributing and working just as hard and as much as someone who might have a degree or an apprenticeship or something.

(24 year old young Anglo Aboriginal woman)

So far in this chapter we have provided something of a description of young workers and of the way that many of them are open to abuse. Now it is time to consider how the Australian trade union movement currently chooses to deal with young people's issues. This section of the paper will focus on what seems to have become "youth policy" for the union movement. The "campaign" directed at the abolition of junior wages, moves directed at the

restructuring of awards and a commitment to 'skills training' largely make up the current priorities for the A.C.T.U. and most of its affiliate unions.

At its September Congress meeting in 1989 the A.C.T.U. adopted a "youth policy" that included a commitment to seeing all junior or youth wages abolished and replaced with a wages system which attaches wage levels to skill training. This policy was based on the 1987 Congress' view that: "The only justification for the payment of less than adult rates to junior employees, lies in the provision by employers of appropriate training for young workers, (whether by apprenticeship or otherwise)" (A.C.T.U. 1987, p. 4). Or, in other words, the only rationale for paying a discounted wage should be if the young worker is receiving training to bring them up to a required skill level. If no training is required then the young worker must be skilled enough and hence worthy of a full wage (Boswell, 1990, p. 1).

The youth or junior wage is based on the assumptions that young people are less productive than adult workers, that it somehow costs less to survive if you are young and that junior wages help to keep young workers "competitive" in a labour market with considerable youth unemployment.

There is little evidence that any of these assumptions are accurate. Material from a range of sources indicate that most young people are financially independent of their parents by the time they reach 18. (See Mass, 1988; Moore, 1988 & Hartley, 1989) Those arguing for the maintaining of junior wages assume that a financially independent young person can get away with paying 60-70% of the cost of goods and services. This, of course, is not so. The argument that young workers are not as productive as older workers is likewise flawed. Boswell (1990, p. 1) argues that:

In this age of technology the belief that productivity is linked to age is also unrealistic;..... indeed in some industries, such as the clothing industry, there are attempts to force out workers over thirty as they have 'past their time'.

Windshuttle's (1985) and Short's (1987) papers put paid to the idea that junior wages help to keep youth unemployment at bay. Their research indicates that youth wages have declined in relation to adult wages since the mid 1970s while youth unemployment has increased significantly. This establishes that changes in youth wages relative to adult wages are not the cause of youth

unemployment. In fact, "youth wages in the 1980's have declined to the extent that the ratio of junior male to adult male wages in 1986 was the lowest since 1964, and for females it was the lowest ever since figures were first recorded in 1962" (A.C.T.U. 1989d, p.7). Whereas junior award rates are, on average, set at 65% of the adult rate, in reality the A.C.T.U. now says that they would represent no more than 50% of actual adult wages (A.C.T.U. 1989d, p.7).

As the recent Youth Policy paper of the A.C.T.U. (1989e, p.4) states, "it is clear from a range of authoritative recent reports that the pathetically low wages paid to workers under the age of twenty one, are pushing more and more youngsters into desperate circumstances." This paper estimates that 40% of full-time workers under twenty one earn less than \$168.30 per week. This figure indicates that more than 90% of full-time young workers are situated within the lowest quarter of Australia's income recipients. (A.C.T.U. 1989c, p.4)

Unfortunately while replacing a discounted wage on the basis of age with one on the basis of skills and training may sound reasonable, it too could have problems and it too needs closer examination.



As well as remembering that the trade union movement is intent on boosting the numbers of its young members through the junior wages campaign, arguably an objective that is to the advantage of unionists, it is also important to understand the relevance of award restructuring.

Since the production of Australia Reconstructed (1987) and Skills for Australia (1987), which largely set the economic agenda for both the Federal Government and the A.C.T.U., the key to the nation's improved economic performance has been seen to lie in major changes in the way that industries are organised. The intention of this kind of economic reform is to encourage improved competition within the context of technologically advanced production and sophisticated international markets. Restructuring awards, reducing the number of unions and improving the skills of Australian workers are all central to the idea of "Strategic Unionism" proposed in Australia Reconstructed.

If these proposals are to work and to work consistently in all industries, young people must be: i) provided pay rates linked to skill level rather than reflect age or other determinates; ii) recruited into strong "mega" or "super" unions; and iii) "actively" encouraged to take up

training endeavours (Commonwealth of Australia, 1987b, p. 17).

Of significant concern in respect to some of the premises behind the restructuring of industry is the failure, in almost all of the major documents and policy statements, to clearly define the concept of skill. Not only is 'skill' largely undefined but it is also used in a context where it is assumed to be unquestionably positive for the worker. As White (1988b, p. 2) says, "accompanying the lack of precision in 'skills formation' rhetoric is the idea that 'training' is and must be inherently 'good', both in terms of the content and with regard to the outcomes." Instead of a commitment to training and award restructuring that will enhance the position of workers it seems primary concern is centred on increasing the productivity of Australian Industry.

Rather than productivity and the restructuring of awards benefiting all workers it is more likely that better organised and industrially powerful workers will reap benefits at the expense of less influential workers "clustered in the service, public and low value manufacturing sectors" (Burgmann 1990, p. 16). As Van Tijn (1990, p.5) warns, young workers joining the work force either for the first time or from the ranks of the

long term unemployed will be particularly vulnerable when negotiating wages, conditions and training deals.

It is not necessarily the case that the replacing of a junior wage with a training wage will automatically guarantee improved conditions or "adequate" training for young workers. Without more careful consideration the danger is that "young" workers will be transformed into "trainees", or rather "youth labour" may be redefined as "unskilled labour" while wages and conditions remain largely unchanged. As White (1990b, p. 18) points out: "The worker currently making the Big Mac and chips, or the chicken with special herbs and spices, will now be the trainee burger maker, the trainee chicken cooker." The only thing likely to change will be the value of the work that the young person is engaged in.

Reeders (1988, p. 149) provides a number of anecdotal descriptions of what fast food employers are now classifying as "skills training" in an attempt to justify the payment of inadequate wages to young workers. Alan, an ex-fast food employee said: "Its very easy to learn the basics, but what they expect you to know, I mean, is speed." And Joyce, another fast food employee said, "That's the skill they're after, speed." This may have enormous repercussions for some groups of young workers.

Rather than being locked into insufficient wages by virtue of their age some social groups will be locked into "unskilled", unpaid or poorly paid work for the rest of their lives.

In the past the construction of skill has resulted in women's work being largely defined as unskilled work, hence leaving women trapped in "unskilled" jobs with little means of escape. As Phillips and Taylor (cited in Pocock, 1988, p. 10-11) comment, "the classification of women's jobs as skilled or semiskilled frequently bears little relation to the amount of training or ability required for them. Skill definitions are saturated with sexual bias."

From this we can see how it is likely that young women, working class young people, young Aborigines, young people living in areas with limited employment opportunities and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds will be subject to less than full wages. In other words, rather than age being the principle determinate of one's level of pay, gender, ethnicity, social background and locality will replace it. In real terms this may have even worse consequences for particular social groups of young people.

Of course the abolition of junior wages, award restructuring and skills training does nothing to address the ever-present and profound problem of youth unemployment. Recent empirical evidence indicates that while income is decreasing, living costs are increasing for young people trying to survive on social security benefits and allowances (See Hartley, 1989; Moore, 1988). Even if award restructuring does result in more highly trained workers and increases in the nations productivity, the unemployed poor, who will theoretically be better trained and more skilful, are unlikely to reap any of the rewards.

Not only does this have direct implications for unemployed young people but also the link between the unemployed and employed poor. As Van Tijn (1990, p. 6) points out, unemployed young people represent a "pool of exploitable labour that will be available under informal arrangements to work for employers for unacceptable wages and conditions." Therefore jobs otherwise being filled by those operating as formal waged labour will be taken by casual and informal young workers desperately in need of cash. As White (1990b) further argues, as long as unemployment is high young workers will be persuaded to accept lower wages, unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, tenuous work and general harassment and

exploitation in the work place.

The significance of unemployment cannot be overstated when considering the relationship between young people and unions as one of the young women involved in the interviews highlights.

D.P.:

Why do you think young people aren't joining unions to the same degree that they have in the past?

Mary:

That whole thing of being unemployed for a long time and going and finding a job at last and thinking that you're really lucky to have a job... So you don't want to rock the boat cos you think that you're so lucky to have work because you've had no money and now you've finally got money. So 'I'm lucky' is the feeling that comes into it. I know it did with me.

**CONCLUSION**

Robert:

The union probably relates very well with the young accountant carrying a brief case and wearing a pin striped suit because he fits into the mould of someone who could relate to a union. I don't think that an unemployed youth gives a stuff who the unions are cos the unions don't seem to give a stuff who they are.

(23 year old male part-time worker)

The question of who benefits from union activity is a difficult and sensitive one. While in theory, the potential of trade unions to provide protection and representation is enormous, in practice they have not been able to produce the goods for many young workers. For many young people, their experiences are all too similar. They are locked out of participation in unions, either through non-membership, lack of information or alienating structures and procedures. Unions are unlikely to acknowledge and act on young people's issues if young people are not participating in their decision making structures.

Unless unions openly challenge social and economic policies that force young people into poverty, unemployment and lower positioned jobs they are likely to find that many young workers will be reluctant to become members. If young people become victims of a policy direction that results in the further disadvantage of many young workers it is likely that unions will find themselves with a band of workers who are at best unsympathetic or at worst openly hostile to union activity.

Unions must change practices that result in many young people being kept in the dark and at a distance. Until there is a commitment to finding more ways of democratically involving young workers, (along with other members of the rank and file), in their activities, unions will have to accept criticism of their performance in respect of young workers.

If unions continue to: i) blanketly accept the idea of replacing junior wages with a training wage without due consideration to the consequences for vulnerable groups of young workers; ii) embrace notions such as skills training without a critical re-definition of 'skill'; and iii) move towards the restructuring of awards without recognising the implications for young



women, Aborigines and the unemployed; they will have to accept that large numbers of young people will likely be severely disadvantaged in securing "for themselves" a fair deal.

Finally, and most importantly, the trade union movement must start recognising that they have a multiplicity of "young peoples" to consider. The question or perspective that this chapter is concerned with cannot be properly considered without first acknowledging that different groups of young people are benefiting and will benefit in distinctly different ways from the activities of unions. If unions are honestly concerned with understanding and acting on young people's concerns and interests they must first understand which young people they are talking about.

**CHAPTER 6**

**CONCLUSION**

The question of young people's membership in trade unions is a difficult one to come to terms with perhaps now more than ever. The topic is not made any easier by the fact that both the trade union movement and 'youth' are undergoing major transformations as we move into the 1990s. Trade unions are currently reorganising themselves in an attempt to accommodate changes in the labour process. The problem of declining membership is especially serious for unions struggling to keep up with these changes. Many young people are also being forced to make similar adjustments. These young people are often limited to choosing between staying on at school, participating in training programmes that are unlikely to provide them with stable and secure paid work, joining the ranks of the long term unemployed, or working under precarious conditions in tenuous jobs which leave them poorly paid.

### **THE STUDY**

This study has examined three of the more popular responses to the question: why are the numbers of young people joining unions declining? While each of these perspectives deserve careful consideration and provide important insights into the topic, in and of themselves, they do not adequately answer the main question.

It is certainly true that changes to the world of work that have taken place over the past twenty years cannot be overlooked. Locked out of full-time and permanent jobs and forced into long bouts of unemployment, part-time, casual or informal work, many young people have found it very difficult to join unions. The failure on the part of many unions to demand a return to full employment, and supporting uncritically the notion that 'skills formation' is the cure-all answer to economic recession does little to improve the life chances of many young people who are out of work.

Similarly there can be no denying that poor marketing leads to poor membership. Young people, often "stuck" in isolated jobs and hence often inadequately informed, will not join unions unless they are provided with relevant information and an explanation of the value unionism. On the other hand a 'strategy' centred around concrete practices, such as campaigns to improve the poor working conditions of particular groups of young people, would certainly improve the image of unions in the eyes of those currently ignorant of what unions can and should do for them.

There is also the more contentious argument that the interests of young people are largely incompatible with

those of unions. Certainly from a historical point of view, young people have been amongst the most poorly represented groups of workers. Until perhaps the mid to late 1980s the "youth question" rarely found its way onto union agendas. Whether it was due to young people's lack of industrial muscle, their inexperience or because it was assumed that their "time would come", young people have rarely been incorporated into the consultative structures of unions.

#### THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF 'YOUTH'

The theme running throughout this thesis has been that each of these perspectives are inadequate unless the concept of youth is better understood. To view young people as a homogenous group when considering the question of union membership promotes age as a principle determinant of a person's life opportunities. While recognising the growing significance of age, to overstate its importance is to ignore the material impact of class, gender and 'race' relations and the importance of locality and ability in determining who joins trade unions. If the thesis question is to be adequately resolved then researchers must first clearly choose which young people they are interested in focusing on.

A number of young people interviewed were quite clear about making this distinction when they asked for more clarity to some of the questions:

Robert:

Whether I think that young people should be more involved in unions is a hard question. Like it depends on what or which young people you are talking about.

Mary:

What do you mean by young people? Which ones?

Michelle:

Can you be more specific? What sort of young people?

Seik:

Which young people? Working or not working?

**RETHINKING THE PROBLEM.**

While many of the debates and discussions about young people's membership in unions took place at the 1989 A.C.T.U. Congress and already a number of strategies have been put into place it is not too late to rethink the crucial underlying issues. Critical to what has been left out of these debates is the theme of this thesis, namely, that age is not the principle determinate of worker's position in the labour process.

Rather, as has been demonstrated, different groups of young people are affected in different ways by wider social, economic and occupational structures. For example, in their search for secure work in unionised industries young women are not only being forced to compete with workers of their own age but with older women forced to return to the labour market. The unemployed and working poor, largely resigned to their position in the labour market, are also unlikely to share a close and intimate relationship with trade unions in the future. As Jamrozik (1988, p. 27), argues, it is young people from working families who will be most marginalised by changes in the world of work.

It was also established that various groups of young people are affected differently by both anti-union and union propaganda. Already at a disadvantage through a failure on the part of schools and other education and training programmes to provide information, groups such as young Aborigines and young people from non-Anglo backgrounds are unlikely to gain much value out of glossy magazines presenting an image of consensus and negotiation.

Similarly it was found in a discussion of the past and present achievements of the trade union movement that unions have not been able to provide evidence of a commitment to young people from non-English speaking backgrounds; to young women, unless they were fortunate enough to find themselves in the primary labour force; to young Aborigines; or to the young unemployed.

Some unionists consulted during this study suggested that "fine-tuning" recruiting strategies by targeting particular groups of young people is the way to deal with the problem of declining membership. However if unions are genuinely committed to the protection of young workers then it is imperative that they re-examine the problem of 'youth' membership more critically. As Mary reminds us, there is little point in marketing unions



purely for the sake of marketing unions. Regardless of how attractive unions are depicted in their marketing efforts, vulnerable young workers will see no reason to join until their needs and interests are provided for.

D.P.:

Do you think that unions should try and stop the decline and if so how?

Mary:

Maybe unions could work at making the work-place market a much more hospitable place for young people. That might increase the numbers of young people joining. But if they are just aiming at getting more young people to join and not working to get changes for them then I don't see the point.

#### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In conclusion, if unions are serious about increasing the numbers of young people joining, they must rethink the whole problem. No longer can union researchers and policy makers ignore the plight of the unemployed or working poor while taking part in award restructuring

which largely benefits English speaking men already working in the organised trades. Rather, if unions are serious about improving their membership they must undertake a genuine commitment to the adoption of industrial, economic and social strategies that benefit specific categories of young people as well as workers as a whole.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Ashenden, Dean (1990). The Student-Workers: The Extent, Character, Consequences and Possibilities of Part-Time Work by Secondary Students. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (1987a). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders: Australia, States and Territories. Catalogue No. 2499.0.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (1987b). Labour Force Survey: Measuring Teenage Unemployment. (Information Paper). Catalogue No. 6270.0.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (1988). Trade Union Members: Australia. Catalogue No. 6325.0.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (1989). The Labour Force. Catalogue No. 6203.0.

Australian Council of Trade Unions (1987). Youth Policy. Melbourne: A.C.T.U.

Australian Council of Trade Unions (1988). Unions: Working For Australia's Future. A.C.T.U. Youth Book. 1987-88. Melbourne: A.C.T.U.

Australian Council of Trade Unions (1989a) About/U: Ten Topics From the World of Work. Melbourne: A.C.T.U.

Australian Council of Trade Unions (1989b). Over 2 U: A Magazine About Jobs. Melbourne: Australian Union Movement Communication Services.

Australian Council of Trade Unions (1989c). Youth Book: 1989-90. Melbourne: A.C.T.U.

Australian Council of Trade Unions (1989d). Youth Strategy 1989. Melbourne: A.C.T.U.

Australian Council of Trade Unions/Trade Development Council (1987). Australia Reconstructed: A Report by the Mission Members to the A.C.T.U. and the T.D.C. Canberra: Australian Government.

Baldock, Cora (1988). Volunteer work as work: some theoretical considerations. In Baldock, C. & Cass, B. (Eds.), Women, Social Welfare and the State. (pp. 278-296). Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Berry, Peter (1989). Can Unions Survive? Melbourne:  
Australian Council of Trade Unions.

Bilton, Tony; Bonnett, Kevin; Jones, Philip; Stanworth,  
Michelle; Sheard, Ken & Webster, Andrew (1981).  
Introductory Sociology. London: MacMillan.

Boswell, Lois (1990). (Draft policy paper). U.T.L.C.  
Policy on the Abolition of Junior Rates of Pay. Adelaide:  
United Trades and Labour Council.

Brake, Michael (1985). Comparative Youth Culture: The  
Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures in  
America, Britain and Canada. London: Routledge and Kegan  
Paul.

Braverman, Harry (1974). Labour and Monopoly Capital: the  
Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century. England:  
Monthly Review.

Bropho, Robert (1980). Fringedweller, Fringedweller.  
Australia: Alternative.

Brown, Christopher (1983). Young people and social change in rural Western Australia. In Smith, R.W. (Ed.), Network: Anthology 1983: Working With Youth. (pp. 7-11). Western Australia: Department for Youth, Sport and Recreation.

Burchell, David (1989, November/December). Stemming the tide. Australian Left Review, 113, 26-30.

Burgmann, Meredith (1990). Mistaken enterprise. Australian Left Review, 119, 15-16.

Carey, Alex (1987). Managing public opinion: the corporate offensive. In Frenkel, S.J. (Ed.), Union Strategy and Industrial Change. (pp. 12-54). Australia: New South Wales University.

Carney, Shaun (1988). Australia in Accord: Politics and Industrial Relations Under the Hawke Government. Melbourne: MacMillan.

Castles Stephen; Kalantzis, Mary; Cope, Bill and Morrissey, Michael (1988). Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia. Sydney: Pluto.

Clarke, John; Hall, Stuart; Jefferson, Tony & Roberts, Brian (1976). Subcultures, cultures and class: a theoretical overview. In Hall, S. & Jefferson, T. (Eds.), Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain. (pp. 9-74). London: Hutchinson.

Cohen, L. & Manion, L. (1980), Research Methods in Education. London: Croom Helm.

Cohen, Philip (1984). Against the new vocationalism. In Bates et. al. (Eds.), Schooling for the Dole: The New Vocationalism. (pp. 104-169). England: MacMillan.

Collins, Jock (1988). Migrant Hands in a Distant Land: Australia's Post-War Immigration. Sydney: Pluto.

Commonwealth of Australia (1987a). Aboriginal Employment Development Policy: Policy Statement. Canberra: Australian Government.

Commonwealth of Australia (1987b). Skills for Australia. Canberra: Australian Government.

Commonwealth of Australia (1987c). 1987-88 Budget Initial Measures, May 1987. Canberra: Australian Government.



Corrigan, Paul (1979). Schooling the Smash Street Kids. London: MacMillan.

Coventry, G.; Cornish, G.; Stricker, P.; Cooke, R. & O'Brien, A. (1984). Part-Time Work and Youth in Transition. Melbourne: Victorian Institute of Secondary Education.

Cupper, L. (1980). Unions and youth: a step in the right direction. Journal of Industrial Relations, 22 (1), 36-53.

Dalziel, Elina (1989). Students at Work: School Students in Part-Time Employment. Canberra: Curriculum Development Centre.

Davis, Edward (1982). Trade unions and the media in Australia. In Cole, K. (Ed.), Power, Conflict and Control in Australian Trade Unions. (pp. 15-34). Australia: Pelican.

Dorn, Nicholas & South, Nigel (1983). Of Males and Markets: A Critical Review of 'Youth Culture' Theory. Middlesex: Centre for Occupational and Community Research.

Durack, Stephany & Kelly, Carol (1990). Study, Training and Work: 2188 Young People Have Their Say: A Report on the Results of the Youth Voice 1990 Survey Conducted by the Youth Participation Project in Conjunction with the Youth Affairs Bureau. Perth: Government of Western Australia.

Dwyer, Peter; Wilson, Bruce & Woock, Roger (1984). Confronting School and Work. Australia: George Allen and Unwin.

Eckersley, Richard (1988). Casualties of Change. The Predicament of Youth in Australia: A Report on the Social and Psychological Problems Faced by Young People in Australia. Canberra: Commission for the Future.

Finn, Dan (1987). Training Without Jobs: New Deals and Broken Promises. London: MacMillan.

Freeland, John (1987, July). Welfare and jobs connection. Australian Social Welfare. Impact, 7.

Frith, Simon (1984). The Sociology of Youth. Great Britain: Causeway.

Game, A. & Pringle, R. (1983). Gender at Work. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin.

Gleeson, Denis (1986). Further education, free enterprise and the curriculum. In Walker, S. and Barton, L. (Eds.), Youth, Unemployment and Schooling. (pp. 46-66). Philadelphia: Open University.

Graycar, Adam & Jamrozik, Adam (1989). How Australians Live: Social Policy in Theory and Practice. Australia: MacMillan.

Griffin, Christine (1985). Typical Girls: Young Women From School to the Job Market. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Hagan, James (1977). The A.C.T.U.: A Short History on the occasion of the 50th anniversary. Sydney: Reed.

Hagan , Jim (1983). The Australian Union Movement - context and perspective 1850 - 1980. In Ford, B. & Plowman, D. (Eds.), Australian Unions - An Industrial Relations Perspective. (pp. 30-59). Melbourne: MacMillan.

Harris, Kathy & Moore, Tony (1988). Move on up: young people and unions. Undercurrent: The Journal of Youth Affairs in New South Wales. 4, 2-3.

Hartley, Robyn (1989). What Price Independence? Report of a Study on Young People's Incomes and Living Costs. Canberra: National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies.

Hone, Margo and Williams, Lynne (1989). Young People: Their Relationship with Trade Unions and the Impact of Award Restructuring. Melbourne: Labour Market Research and Policy Branch, Department of Labour.

Horne, John (1987). Work and Unemployment. London: Longman.

Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (1989). Our Homeless Children. Canberra: Australian Government.

Hutson, Jack (1966). Penal Colony to Penal Powers. New South Wales: Amalgamated Metals Foundry and Shipwrights Union.

Jamrozik, Adam (1988). Young people, the family and social class: issues for research and social policy. Youth Studies Bulletin, 7(1), 26-32.

Job Watch (1989). School Student Employment Survey  
Project: Progress Report. Melbourne: Job Watch.

Lawrence, Geoffrey, (1987). Capitalism and the  
Countryside. Sydney: Pluto.

Lever-Tracy, Constance (1984). A new Australian working  
class leadership: the case of Ford Broadmeadows. In  
Bottomley, G. and de Lepervanche, M. (Eds.), Ethnicity,  
Class and Gender in Australia. pp. 123-143. Australia:  
George Allen and Unwin.

Lever-Tracy, C. (1988). The flexibility debate: part-time  
work. Labour and Industry. 2, 210-241.

Lewis, Helen (1990). Part-time Work: Trends and Issues.  
Canberra: Australian Government.

Martin, Ross (1975). Trade Unions in Australia: Who Runs  
Them - Their Politics, Their Power. Australia: Penguin.

Mass, Frank (1988). Young people's incomes, living  
arrangements and labour force status: An examination of  
existing data sets regarding youth incomes. Melbourne:  
Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Mass, Frank (1990). Becoming adults: the effects of prolonged dependence on young people. *Youth Studies*, 9(1), 21-29.

Mattera, P. (1985). Off the Books: The Rise of the Underground Economy. London: Pluto.

McColl, Margaret (1983). Unions and the media. In Ford, B. and Plowman, D. (Eds.), Australian Unions: An Industrial Relations Perspective. (pp. 441-466). Australia: MacMillan.

McDonald, Lachlan (1989, September 27). Move to abolish junior pay rates. The West Australian, p. 12.

McLeod, Don (1984). How the West Was Lost. Port Hedland: D.W. McLeod.

McRobbie, Angela & Nava, Mica (1984). Introduction. In McRobbie, A. and Nava, M. (Eds.), Gender and Generation. (pp. ix-xii). London: MacMillan.

Miller, Mick (Chairman). (1985). Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs. Canberra: Australian Government.

Moore, Robert (1984). Schooling and the world of work. In Bates et. al. (Eds.), Schooling for the Dole: The New Vocationalism. (pp. 65-103) England: MacMillan.

Moore, Tony (1988). Counting the Costs: The D.Y.S.A. Youth Incomes and Living Costs Study. Sydney: Developmental Youth Services Association.

Murphy, M. (1989). Unemployment among young people: social and psychological causes and consequences. Youth and Policy, 29 11-19.

Nichols, Dick (1987). New Right Trade Unionism and the Crisis of the Left. New South Wales: New Course.

Nolan, Kaye and Hagen, Rod (1989). School and Work: A Report into the Employment of School Students at Two Melbourne High Schools. Melbourne: Job Watch.

Otto, Di (1982). Common ground? Young women, sub-cultures and feminism. Scarlet Woman, 15, 3-8.

Palmer, Dave (1988). Learning About Trade Unions: Report of a Consultation with Secondary Students. Adelaide: Office of Employment and Training.

Plowman, D. & Deery, S. (1985). Australian Industrial Relations. Sydney: McGraw Hill.

Pocock, Barbara (1988). Demanding Skill: Women and Technical Education in Australia. Australia: Allen and Unwin.

Polk, Kenneth & Tait, David (1990). Changing youth labour markets and youth lifestyles. Youth Studies, 9 (1), 17-23.

Rawson, Don & Merrill, Vance (1980). What unions should be doing? In Mayer, H. and Nelson, H. (Eds.), Australian Politics 5. (pp. 480-484). Melbourne: Longman and Cheshire.

Reeders, Ern (1988). The fast food industry. In Willis, E. (Ed.), Technology and the Labour Process. (pp. 142-154). North Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Roberts, Kenneth (1983). Youth and Leisure. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Robertson, Jenni; Thom, Jessica & Thomson, Mark (n.d.) Working: Real Life Experiences. Adelaide; United Trades and Labour Council.



Robson, Steven (1989, October 17). Can unions survive? - The B.W.I.U.'s book of missing chapters. Direct Action, p. 2.

Ross, Russell (1988). Teenagers in the Labour Market: 1983 - 1988. New South Wales: Social Welfare Research Centre.

Rosser, Bill (1985). Dreamtime Nightmares. Australia: Penguin.

Saw, Melanie & Menegola, Shaun (1990, April 11). Fast food staff win claim. The West Australian, p. 5.

Sercombe, Howard (1990). Youth : Towards a Sociological Definition. Claremont: Western Australian College of Advanced Education.

Short, Christine (1988 December). The relationship between youth and adult ward wages from 1930-1988. Journal of Industrial Relations, 3, 491-509.

Stevens, Frank (1974). Aborigines in the Northern Territory Cattle Industry. Canberra: Australian National University.

Stevens, Frank (1980). The Politics of Prejudice. Sydney: Alternative.

Stillwell, Frank (1986). The Accord and Beyond: The Political Economy of the Labour Government. Sydney: Pluto.

Sweet, Richard (1987). The Youth Labour Market: A Twenty Year Perspective. Canberra: Curriculum Development Centre.

Toohy, Brian (1990 May 21). Getting to grips with the core of education. The West Australian, p. 11.

United Trades and Labour Council (1988). Working: Real Life Experiences. Adelaide: U.T.L.C.

Van Tijn, Martin (1990). (Issues paper). Youth Wages. Adelaide: Youth Affairs Division - Department of Employment and T.A.F.E.

Vellekoop-Baldock, Cora (1990). Volunteers in Welfare. Australia: Allen and Unwin.

Walker, J. C. (1988). Louts and Legends: Male Youth Culture in an Inner City School. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Wallace, Clare (1986). Broken Transitions: From School to the Scrap Heap. Unpublished paper. Department of Psychology, University of Birmingham.

White, Rob (1984). The Media and Teachers' Strikes. N.S.W. 1981. Canberra: Australian Teachers' Federation.

White, Rob (1988a, December). Labour in transition: work in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Paper presented at the Conference of the Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand, Canberra.

White, Rob (1988b). Skill Training and Youth Formation. Youth Studies, 7(4) & 8(1), 9-14.

White, Rob (1989). Making ends meet: Young people, work and the criminal economy. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology, 22, 136-150.

White, Rob (1990a). No Space of Their Own: Young People and Social Control in Australia. Melbourne: Cambridge University.

White, Rob (1990b). So what's wrong with youth wages? Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia News Bulletin, 10, 17-18.

Williams, Pamela (1989). A brave new world. Australian Left Review, 113, 30-31.

Willis, Paul (1977). Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs. England: Gower.

Willis, Paul (1984). Conclusion: theory and practice. In Bates, I. et. al. (Eds.), Schooling for the Dole: The New Vocationalism. (pp.220-228). London: MacMillan.

Wilson, Bruce (1989). Early Labour Market Experience of Young People: An Overview, and Proposal for Further Research. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre.

Wilson, Bruce & Wyn, Johanna (1987) Shaping Futures: Youth Action for Livelihood. Australia: Allen and Unwin.

Wilson, Bruce; Wyn, Johanna; Reeder, Ern & Woock, Roger (1987). Education, Work and Youth Policy. Canberra: Curriculum Development Centre.

Wilton, Janis & Bosworth, Richard (1984). Old Worlds and New Australia: The Post-War Migrant Experience. Australia: Penguin.

Windshuttle, Keith (1985). Youth Wages, Employment and Unemployment: A Critique of a Study by the Bureau of Labour Market Research. Sydney: University of New South Wales.

Youth Policy Development Council (1987). Health For You - Final Report: Policy and Strategies. Melbourne: Youth Policy Development Council.

Youthworker (1986). The traineeship scheme. Adelaide: Youth Affairs Council of South Australia.