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Australian Council of Trade Unions and Community Arts Board of the Australia Council, (1983), Art & Working Life - Cultural Activities in the Australian trade union movement 1983, Australian Council of Trade Unions and Community Arts Board of the Australia Council, Melbourne, 20p.
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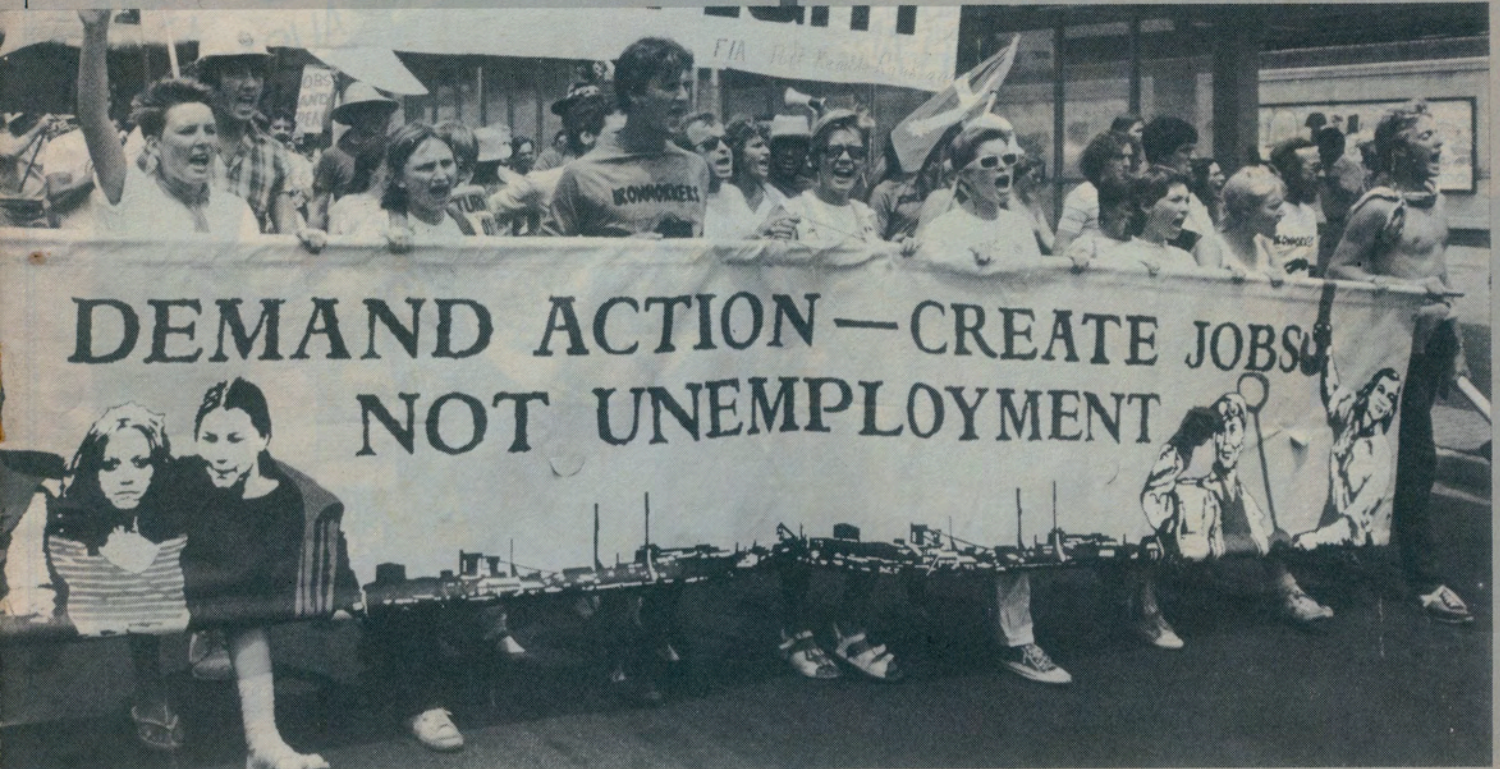
Art & Working Life - Cultural Activities in the Australian trade union movement 1983

Description

Booklet accompanying an exhibition held at the Trades Hall, Melbourne, along with outlining policies related to collaboration between artists and the union movement.

Publisher

Australian Council of Trade Unions and Community Arts Board of the Australia Council, Melbourne, 20p



Art & Working Life

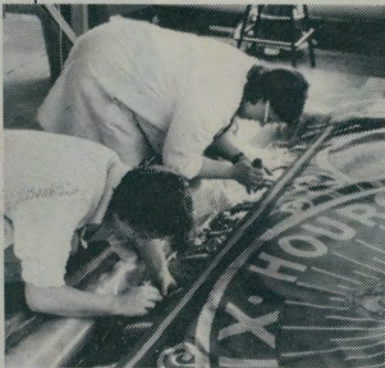
Cultural activities in the
Australian trade union
movement 1983

Right
**Miscellaneous Workers
Union banner**

A recently-painted banner produced for the Newcastle Branch of the Miscellaneous Workers Union by Birgitte Hansen Chawner.

The artist was approached by the Union through the Newcastle Workers' Cultural Action Committee. Old union banners were researched and the design based on the banner of the Leather Dressers who became affiliated with the MWU. The images are of two union members, a school cleaner and a nightwatchman, and a scene of Newcastle including the hospital where many members work. An initial design was produced and submitted to the union executive, with changes in the original concept being made and approved.

The banner was painted using acrylic scenic paint and is stretched on an aluminium frame. The roping was knotted by a local seaman.



Above
Restoration of ten of the banners being carried out by the conservation unit of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, for temporary display at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. The Trades Hall Association has established a fund for the restoration of further banners.

Right
Old banners in storage at the Trades Hall, Sydney.



"The history of the trade union movement shows a significant impact on the cultural life of Australia and its development in the past. This impact needs to be extended and developed in current circumstances."

So begins the ACTU Arts and Creative Recreation Policy (1980). In September 1982, the Australia Council adopted a policy on Art and Working Life committing itself to a programme supporting similar aims. With such backing, the above objective can be transformed into a vital dimension of the life of working people and strengthen the cultural traditions of the labour movement as a whole.

Right

ACTU President Cliff Dolan addressing participants at the ACTU-sponsored seminar on 'Art and Working Life', Melbourne 1981. Seated left is ACTU Arts Officer, Jean McLean. Photo: Helen Grace.



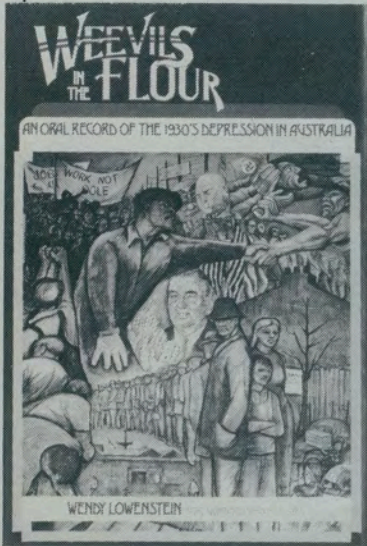
This publication was produced by Union Media Services Pty Ltd for the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Community Arts Board of the Australia Council. The text was prepared by Union Media Services; the article on the Art and Working Life Policy of the Australia Council was written by Deborah Mills; the captions and other text were provided by the artists. Design was by Union Media Services, typesetting by Keen Permoform, and printing by Chippendale Printing Company.

Much of the work reproduced in this publication has been directly funded or assisted by trade unions or other labour organisations. Some of it has been assisted by state funding bodies. Of the projects receiving funding through the Australia Council, not all have been under the Art and Working Life programme.

Caper 18.

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Art & Working Life



Above
Weevils in the Flour:
an oral record of the 1930s
depression in Australia

Wendy Lowenstein. (Melbourne, 1978)
 "Weevils in the Flour is above all a human document, in which about 130 Australians tell the story of a great tragedy, the Depression of the 1930s. What does the family breadwinner do on suddenly getting the sack? How do you manage when you find yourself working every second week, or your wages are cut by twenty per cent, but not your mortgage? Working for the dole pittance, living in shanty towns, camping in empty buildings, standing forever in queues, despised by bureaucrats and slowly losing self respect, blaming yourself — all of this is described by the people who themselves suffered during that time of self-righteous wealth and mistaken economic policies.

Five years in the making, for this book Wendy Lowenstein travelled widely in Australia to tape over 200 interviews. Here are teachers and carpenters, soldier settlers, wharfies, spokesmen for the New Guard and the Communists, coal-miners, swagmen, policemen and businessmen; people who remember the Depression as they were small children, school children, housewives, husbands, single men and women — all ages (the oldest is now over 90) primarily from the working class, for this class is a grass roots study of a period in our history, described by the people who suffered and made the best of it, who somehow endured." Jacket illustration is from a mural in the Waterside Workers' Sydney Branch Canteen originally designed and background painted by Roderick Shaw in 1954-5 so that members of the WWF art group could participate. It has been worked on since by artists Harry McDonald, Clem Millward, Harry Read, Sonny Glynne and Ralph Sawyer.



Left

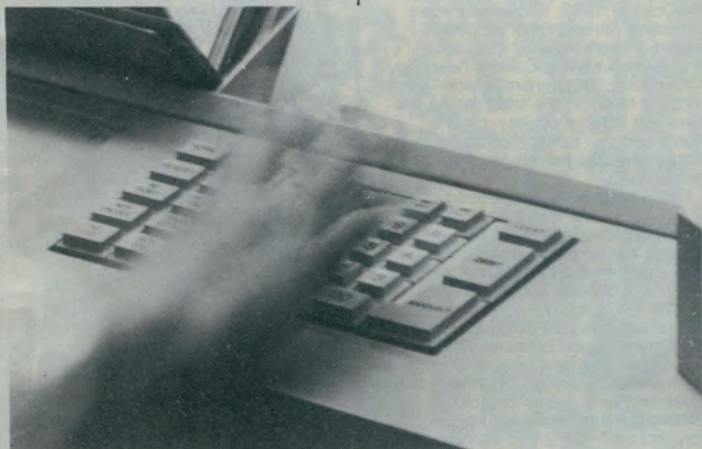
Redback Graffix

Posters by Redback Graffix being carried in steelworkers protest demonstration, Wollongong, October 1982. The posters are based on earlier radical images: the top one is from *Saga — A Protest in Linocuts* by the Workers Artists, 1933, and the other is from a cover illustration by Percy Leason in the 1920s for an edition of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. Photo: Jules Viel, *Direct Action*.

Below

Health and safety: the question of tenosynovitis

Part of the project 'Re-presenting Work', see page 17.



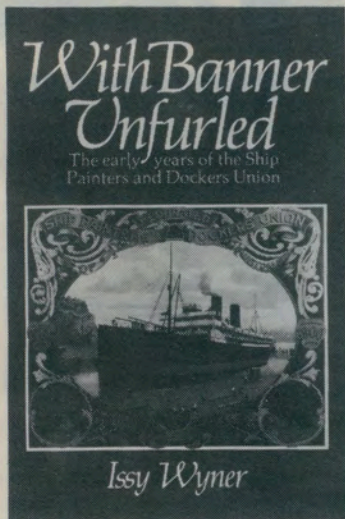
Above
Ship Painters and Dockers Centenary

The 'Banner Unfurling' ceremony during the Centenary celebrations of the NSW Branch of the Union, June 1983.

The banner being unveiled is the union's second one, painted in 1903 and restored at the union's expense in 1979. The celebrations included an extensive exhibition of photographs covering the history of the industry, as well as a display of the art of rigging, fancy rope work and tools used at various periods. Photo: *Workers News*.

Left

A book on the history of the union, researched and written by NSW Secretary Issy Wyner, was also launched during the celebrations.



Strong cultural traditions reflect the capacity of the labour movement to build on its own history.

A union which has lost a sense of its culture loses an essential relation to its own history and the understanding which that gives in current struggles.

It is important then that the Art and Working Life programme should develop in ways which not only embody an understanding of labour movement history and its culture but also are able to contribute to the sense of its significance. **The traditions are there to be built on, revitalised and transformed in that process.**

The history of the union movement is an integral part of a history of Australian society. Unionism became an accepted part of Australian life before most countries and workers here were the first in the world to strike successfully for the eight-hour day in the mid-1850s. Pressure from the early labour movement helped put Australia at the forefront of progressive social and work conditions. In this century, the shift from a rural-based radical trade union movement to an urban-centred industrial and service unionism has shaped much of the character of the labour movement today. As well, the waves of migrants who, especially during the post-war period, provided the cheap labour for the rapid expansion of industry have enriched and transformed many of the cultural traditions within working communities.

The history of labour has markedly influenced the character of culture overall in Australia. It might even be argued that the continuing and strong humanist theme within our wider cultural traditions is itself a reflection of the popular acceptance of trade union values.

This historical consciousness is crucial; it is the understanding of labour's achievements and defeats. While labour movement pressure has forced the enactment of much enlightened social and industrial legislation, in many ways the struggles to advance workers' rights and conditions are the same and merely being fought on different ground. This is illustrated in the degree to which struggles around the introduction of new technology have shifted from blue collar into white collar industries.

There are many ways that unions might see in the Art and Working Life programme a direct means of support: e.g. through commissioning cultural activities (plays, photographic documentation, films, banners, etc.) around union events, campaigns and achievements, union workers and leaders. A sense of historical value may be established from the outset, which means that particular actions, ideas and values cannot be forgotten, overlooked or suppressed. The cultural traditions become the vehicle of labour history: the means of reclaiming and building on past history and projecting its lessons into the future.

Some Boards of the Australia Council have been supporting activities among trade unions for several years and important work has emerged. Yet most would probably agree that, at best, success has been limited. Without diminishing the good work which has been achieved, many projects remain marginal to the major and daily work of unions and their members. These projects have received support of unions, but perhaps too often this has been on grounds of wanting to be seen to be supporting cultural activities, rather than making direct use of artistic resources. And while the

appointment of arts officers to Trades and Labor Councils has assisted some of these activities, taken overall this has not created much on-going involvement of trade unions in the arts. With few exceptions then, art and working life appear to be as far apart as ever.

The way beyond this impasse is for more initiatives to develop within unions themselves in response to their own and members' needs and values. The projects must be seen to contribute to the activities of unions, not rival or distract from their work. The continuing threat of rising unemployment, the fight to maintain real wage levels and the quality of working conditions, the defence of the industrial rights of working people, the indiscriminate introduction of new technology and its impact on jobs and the economy, the erosion of welfare levels and services . . . these are issues absorbing the energies of trade unionists and the Art and Working Life programme can and should contribute to those struggles.

The culture of the labour movement is about how we fight to create a better working life.

Most practical initiatives in the programme to date have come from "outside" the union movement — from artists, arts administrators and officers. This reinforces the false idea that culture is something brought in from the "outside" and that the labour movement has no culture of its own. It has meant also that these initiatives tend to have been shaped by the traditional practice of middle class art. When, as often happens, the values of those practices are taken as the starting point, the art produced has little relevance to union members' lives. This creates a large gap between the artistic practices and the needs of the labour movement.

Up to this stage, even most discussion of art and working life has approached the problems from the "art" direction. While that encompasses a number of different theories, there have been few attempts to engage the issues from a trade union perspective. The ACTU's policy, which stands as a major landmark, remains an extremely generalised document: it is easy to agree with but identifies few values and is short on suggestions about how to implement it. What then are the practical implications of that policy from the viewpoint of labour organisations and working class cultural traditions?

A simple view indicates three different but often overlapping approaches. First, there are the attempts to bring entertainment and educational programmes into the workplace. Second, there is the direct use of artistic forms of expression in trade union work. And third, there is the development of workers' own cultural skills, expression and appreciation. Each of these entails a different relation between culture and work and has a role to play. But in this publication a priority has been given to the second approach — that is, the direct use of artistic forms of expression by unions in fighting for and actively creating a better working life, and ultimately a better life in all aspects.

This aim marks off trade union culture from the leisure cultures which we use to "re-create" ourselves off the job. The cultural traditions of unions involve a blurring of

The Kemira Stay-in

A film produced by Tom Zubrycki "In October 1982, thirty-one miners protesting retrenchment notices staged a sixteen-day sit-in at the BHP-owned Kemira Colliery near Wollongong. The miners' action — to confront head-on the crisis facing the steel and mining industry in Wollongong — forms the subject of a fifty-minute documentary currently in production.

Filming started in the second week of the sit-in. First we covered the combined Miners-Steelworkers march through the centre of Wollongong, then clambered on board the train carrying 2,000 workers and their families to Canberra — the climax of this remarkable day being the Parliament House break-in. We proceeded to spend several days at the Kemira Colliery pit-top where wives and work-mates of the 31 underground miners were keeping constant vigil. We filmed various discussions where people tried to come to an understanding of the Company's actions as well as their own abilities of being able to influence decisions being made in the Company boardrooms in Melbourne and the Arbitration Court in Sydney. We plan to reconstruct these events and intercut them with the miners interpretation of them.

The men eventually came out of the pit after the court had ordered a 2-week moratorium on their jobs plus greatly improved severance conditions. But their sense of victory was short-lived and the families had to confront the chilling prospect of looking for work. In some cases this meant removing their children from local schools and leaving the area. The film follows what happens to these families.

The Kemira Stay-in strike was an important turning point for the Wollongong community and an inspiration for workers throughout Australia. It is therefore vital that issues surrounding the strike are kept alive and discussed inside workplaces





and community organisations. To this end we have made available a 20-minute videotape containing highlights of the sit-in. This is a "trailer" for the longer film to come. The videotape is available from the Southern District office of the Miners Federation in Wollongong or from the film makers (2 Punch Street, Balmain, phone 82 5579). The film was initially funded from our own resources. Subsequently the Creative Development Branch of the Australian Film Commission has made a substantial investment. Donations have also come from the local branch of the Miners Federation. The film-makers are looking for further contributions from unions in order to complete the film. The end result should see a positive uplifting film picturing ordinary people not as victims on the dole queue, but as people trying to take control over their own lives and shape their own destinies."

Top
Workers 'storming' Parliament House, Canberra, 1982.

Far left
Kemira mine worker Jim Roach re-united at the mine with his family.

Left
Scene at the pit-top.



Above
Black Film Unit
 Maureen Watson outside Stadium during the arrests under the Commonwealth Games Legislation, October 1982. (Photo: Ann Stephen).

Tassos Ioannides

Composer in Residence, Victorian Trades Hall.

"Ta Paratragouda" is a documentary in music recording the lives of Greek migrants in Australia. The work was composed by Tassos Ioannides who worked with the Trades Hall Council from June 1982 until May 1983 as Composer in Residence. During this time he spent many hours researching the lives of migrants and talking with workers at a variety of worksites.

The song cycle is scored for a choir, four soloists and an orchestra, including Mediterranean and Australian instruments in addition to conventional orchestral instruments. The music is of an accessible style, combining both traditional Greek and contemporary music influences. The lyrics of the eighteen songs which constitute the piece were written by Demetre Kesisoglou.

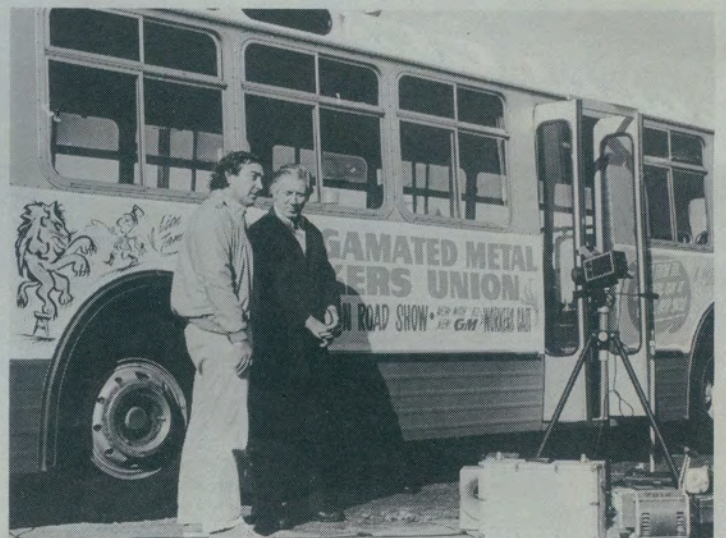
For the premiere, the augmented Melbourne Concert Orchestra, the Florentian Choir, and soloists Jeannie Lewis, Christos Ioannides, Sandy Vatsilas and Michael Kyrios performed the piece to an audience of 1500 people at the Melbourne Concert Hall. The performance was filmed by Channel 0/28 and broadcast in May to a prime time audience in both Melbourne and Sydney.

It is planned to tour a smaller version of "Ta Paratragouda" through work sites and community centres.

Right:
 Black Film crew filming the band No Fixed Address during the Rock Against Racism concert, Brisbane, October 1982. (Photo: Peter Murphy).



Right
AMFSU Bus, Adelaide
 In May, two 'tent cities' were set up in front of G.M.H. plants at Woodville and Elizabeth in SA to protest rationalisation plans and sackings. The bus has been leased from the Transport Department and is touring the factories, workplaces and other areas of Adelaide to seek job and community support to save jobs in the vehicle industry. Equipped with a video unit and PA system, the bus has been very effective in bringing the issues to a wider public, and forcing the question of alternate manufacture for the plants to be considered.





Land of Promises

Land of Promises is a project in which community artists assisted immigrant community members to document some of the experiences and concerns of post World War II immigrants to Australia. A series of silkscreen prints was produced and is now touring South Australian communities.

Land of Promises was developed through a dual artist-in-residency (Andrew Hill and Eugenia Hill) based at Community Media Association, Adelaide. Workshops were held every Saturday afternoon from July to December 1982 to discuss experiences of what life was like for newcomers, and to develop and design the imagery.

The content of the images is not that which is generally reflected in Australian art over recent decades. As the published introduction to the project states:

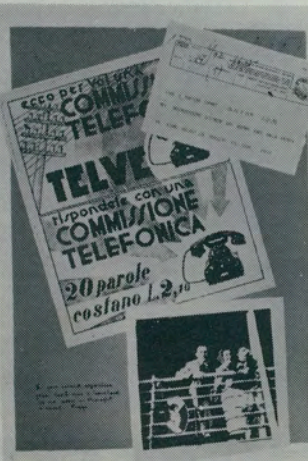
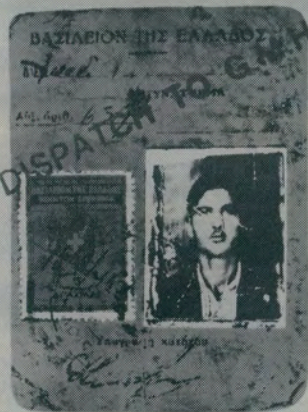
"A very large proportion of our people did not grow up in the secure knowledge that this country was theirs, that they had equal opportunities, equal job access, or equal rights to political self-determination. Language barriers, official attitudes and policies, the industrial need for a compliant labour force which would effectively operate jobs Anglo-Australians shied away from, and would do so for a subsistence wage, ensured many new Australians remained, for at least a generation, a dispossessed group... The Snowy Mountains scheme, Tasmania's hydro-electric scheme, the Riverland fruit industry, the shipbuilding, motor vehicle, housing, construction and whitegoods industries grew up based on immigrant labour..."

At migrant hostels, like Bonegilla, the first understanding of official hospitality was gained in situations devoid of nearly all social and material support structures...

The large support structures which previously surrounded individuals and families in villages or home cities were gone and survival became so much harder for people isolated in a modern developing industrial economy...

Yet alongside the initial dislocation and trauma there was a continuing sense of purpose, a deep need to reinforce familial and ethnic ties, to create support where previously there had been none."

Left
Eugenia Hill, Dispatch to G.M.H.



Left
Giuliana Otmarich. In your painful separation from loved ones and homeland we are near in thought and heart.

the usual distinctions between the arts and media, in favour of communication. While a trade union newspaper may carry a campaign simply and directly, a traditionally cultural event (e.g. a factory play) extends and expands the arguments, connecting them more strongly to people's everyday lives, to their experiences, feelings and needs. It can make the argument more widely acceptable or effective, at the same time giving the issues a cultural importance.

Trade union culture serves as a means of communication and organisation.

Today 49% of the Australian workforce belong to trade unions — nearly 2.6 million people. If we include the families of trade union members, the union movement represents the interests of about half of all the people in Australia.

Altogether there are 156 unions affiliated with the ACTU and a great number not affiliated. The average is a few thousand strong, but the largest twenty unions account for about 60% of the total membership.

So trade union cultural traditions emerge through often large and complex structures, responding to quite practical needs of communication and at the same time contributing to the general well-being of their members.

The forms of this communication reflect the many levels and processes of union organisation. These are, for example, the forms in which a union communicates with its members; or a union communicates industrial and social demands to management within an industry; or a union communicates industrial and other issues to the wider community; or members communicate union issues to their families and the wider community.

These underpin the life of trade union culture. All significant forms of union culture occur within those processes, from the humble campaign pamphlet to the resplendent banners carried in marches.

Even in these days of advanced communications technology, the most traditional of forms, the trade union banner, can be revitalised to retain its practical importance. Television news, regardless of its bias towards the sensational, "instinctively" seeks out the visual image which appears to summarise an event. The banner produced by Redback Graffix (and others) for the South Coast Miners Federation and carried in protest demonstrations in Wollongong and the march on Parliament House in November, has appeared in more news photographs and television news programmes than any other visual symbol as the South Coast miners fight to defend their jobs and stop the closure of mines.

Such a banner serves to identify the union and its members, generally indicates current issues and (perhaps more importantly with today's media) links seemingly separate actions and activities within a wide-ranging campaign or struggle.

So, just as important as restoring the old banners and preserving them in museums is the need for unions to commission new banners, but in forms which reflect their contemporary use. This allows them to be a centre of attention at a mass meeting or demonstration as well

as providing an instantaneous statement of the issues to television audiences throughout Australia.

A contemporary banner should "read" quickly and be flexible in its use — and at the same time must still be seen to be asserting an entire history of union organisation and struggle.

Much less resplendent than the banners, yet often more important, is the ordinary pamphlet produced to put the union's view within a campaign. The argument must be given a visual impact through the structure of its journalism and its design as a visual object, and through its various levels as it is unfolded to be read.

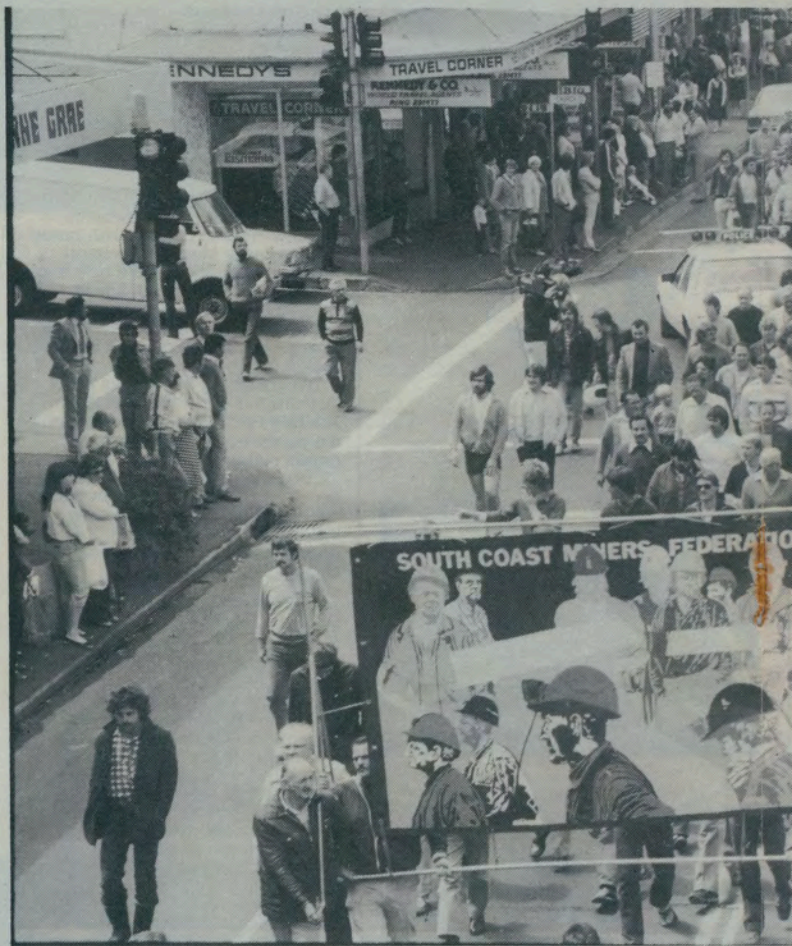
Not fitting unions to artists' ideals, but fitting artists to trade union needs . . .

Traditional romantic concepts of the artist tend to be widely accepted by trade unions as well as funding bodies. Many artists hold a similar view of their role. Few see themselves as workers creating a particular kind of product — a fact reflected in the low level of unionisation in certain cultural areas, especially in the visual arts. This in itself is a source of many difficulties in bringing art and working life together.

Yet artists are trained and work within an industry, whether it is visual art or any other cultural industry. Since the establishment of the Australia Council and other state cultural bodies, these arts industries have received government assistance and sometimes a little protection, as do other industries. So, despite many differences, artists have common grounds with other workers, which give a basis for co-operation from the outset.

Artists often find trade unions difficult to work with — the larger strategies in which unions are involved make them slow to respond to cultural proposals, they often seem to function in bureaucratic ways and demand a lot of patience, effort and flexibility from artists who usually work in much less disciplined ways. Hence many artists do not persevere to uncover ways of participating in the union processes, but instead opt out and satisfy their need for involvement in socially or politically committed activity by contributing to the broader social movements or small activist groups. Without demeaning such work, it often becomes the "easier option". It allows the artist to avoid coming to terms with the wider organisational priorities necessarily underlying much union work. The upshot of this is that issues like the environment, disarmament, Aboriginal land rights, feminism and domestic labour appear as the subject matter of artists far more than issues like the impact of new technology, industrial legislation, industrial health and safety, shorter hours, etc.

Put in this critical light, the "easier option" permits artists to retain their "freedom" in the traditional romantic sense without pressure to evolve or transform their work. On the other hand, trade unionists may also encounter artists who become involved in "trade union" or "community" work as a way of enhancing their art world reputations and so fail to produce work which is of genuine use or interest to unions and their members.



Above
South Coast Miners Federation banner
produced by Redback Grafix with others, being carried in a demonstration in Wollongong, October 1982.

If you brought home could your family support a \$20 wage



Right
ARU poster
Produced by the union and used widely in 1979 campaign.

RAILWAY MAINTENANCE WORKERS LABOR PEOPLE TO SUPPORT FOR WAGE



home \$110 a week
family afford NOT to
D wage claim?



ANCE WORKERS CALL ON ALL
D SUPPORT OUR STRUGGLE
WAGE JUSTICE

For the sake of Social Welfare in Australia,
STOP SENATOR CHANEY!



For many years the Department of Social Security has been a central institution for the well-being of our citizens and the Australian family. It has received innumerable suggestions and requests from Members of all persuasions. It is now fortunate to have a Minister for Social Security Services, Hon. Senator Chaney, M.L.C., M.A., M.P.

- Hon. Senator Chaney has been successful in his efforts to secure a 10% increase in the age pension.
- Hon. Senator Chaney has been successful in his efforts to secure a 10% increase in the age pension.
- Hon. Senator Chaney has been successful in his efforts to secure a 10% increase in the age pension.

**SUPPORT ACOA'S CLAIM
FOR BETTER SERVICE AND MORE STAFF
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY**

Above
ACOA poster, DSS Dispute, 1981
Produced by Union Media Services

... or letting members develop their own skills, forms of expression and appreciation.

The above emphasis on artists should not allow us to overlook the importance of encouraging working people in developing cultural expression according to their own potential and needs. This is important not just because of the prospect of the shorter working week and increased leisure time.

Too often these activities are dismissed as merely "amateur" or spare-time, not worthy of much attention or support. Moreover, the training of artists encourages a self-interested professionalism, so that what most people encounter as culture reinforces the idea that "real" culture should be left to the experts, the "real" artists.

In reassessing amateur activities, we need to develop ways of appreciating them, not by professional standards, not as simply the "low" end of the scale, but as cultural activities which serve different needs within different groups or communities.

Given such criteria, some of the misuses of these programmes may be avoided. It should be obvious that artistic forms of expression can be used for entirely other purposes by management. If it consists of no more than simple entertainment it can have the effect of distracting attention from poor working conditions. For example, music may be used at some workplaces to govern the speed of work or drown out noise. Or, if the work done is particularly unpleasant, workers may be hostile to anything which may make them look more favourably on their working environment.

On the other hand, these amateur activities can encourage other levels of communication among people in their workplaces. They can also encourage "communities of interest" to develop around particular cultural activities.

From a trade union perspective, this can become a means of political expression around issues of the working environment, industrial democracy and the quality of work itself. Since work occupies such a large portion of our lives, it should contribute to our continuing development. This doesn't only mean that jobs should be less monotonous, but also that it should be possible to regard the end product of one's work as worthwhile. Underlying those demands is the ideal of work being both creative and constructive.

This suggests a few of the ways that "amateur" cultural involvements can contribute both to the individual development of working people and to trade union activities.

If people demand meaningful jobs, won't they begin to demand meaningful art?

Many who are seen as just workers produce cultural work. The trade union banners now being restored at great expense and put into museums were originally



Sid Williams

SA Secretary, Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers, Adelaide.

Right:

"An early morning shot of the S.T. Yelta assisting to berth a vessel of the Sanko Line at No. 27 Berth, Pt. Adelaide, which is the grain silo. The Yelta was the last steam tug to work there — she was built in 1949 at Cockatoo Dock, No. 192, and is now a museum piece with the local Nautical Society."

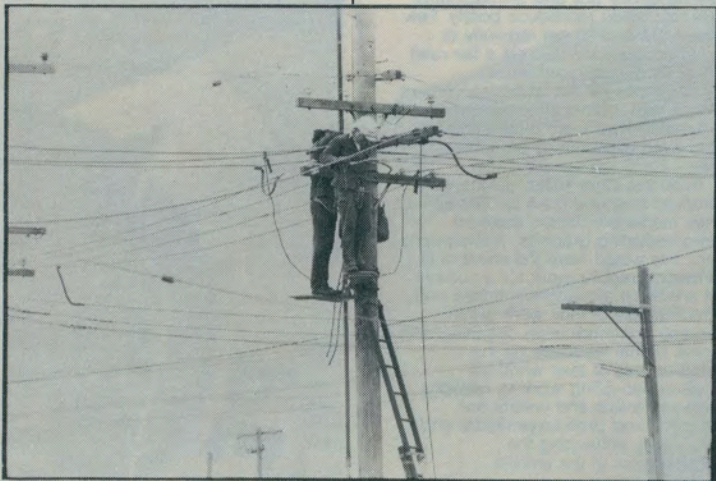
Above:

"Troubridge under tow by M. T. Tapir due to steering problem, c.1980."



Left
Juan Mahony
‘Me, at 5 a.m. — a self-portrait taken at Pt. Waratah Coal Services coal loader.

Below
Linesmen, Botany Bay
Photograph by Oliver Strewe — part of the ACTU-organised photographic exhibition ‘Australia at Work’, 1982.



Above
Preston Sit-in
Warwick Pearse, photographer in residence, Workers’ Cultural Action Committee, Newcastle Trades Hall Council.

“On 24 March 1983, 14 miners decided to occupy the Preston Extended Colliery, near Gunnedah, to regain the 91 jobs lost. With the support of friends and families, the miners sat-in for 54 days and regained 55 jobs. Photographs of the sit-in were exhibited at the Cessnock Workers Club in June.

The photograph above shows Barbara Morrison and Aileen Favell, members of the Women’s Committee which provided food and support for the miners.”

commissioned from “mere” commercial firms (e.g. locally, Althouse and Geiger) employing skilled artists and crafts workers. The artists whose labour cartoons are now reproduced in often expensive books were employees of labour media proprietors or were working under commission on a free-lance basis. Many of the historical photographs that we study and value were taken by commercial or daily press photographers, or sometimes by amateurs.

These artists were employed to do a job and used their skills to the best of their ability . . . and in all probability had strong labour sympathies. They were employed under the terms of the Masters and Servants Act and their rates of pay and working conditions were protected by labour organisations. These artists and skilled crafts workers were working within a trade union environment, not as individual artists. (Why are artists thus employed regarded so lowly today?)

Other artists who, on a free-lance basis, were attracted to this field of work approached it by recognising existing (or potential) needs and using their talents to those ends.

If unionists aren’t interested in culture, it’s because culture often isn’t very interesting.

Since the forties, we have experienced an explosion in communications technology, the commercial basis of which forces products and programmes to appeal to the widest possible audiences. While this tends towards a cultural “standardisation”, it is not leading to a single homogeneous culture. Yet, at the same time, the lack of democratic access to the communications technology has undermined our awareness of the diversity of cultures in Australia, to the detriment of our culture as a whole.

These circumstances have weakened the impact of trade union culture in recent decades. During the same period real history has been “rewritten” in the sanitised forms of television soap operas, movies and school history books. Hence it has been increasingly difficult for unions to present a positive image of themselves.

Moreover, mass media representations of unions have intervened and set up conflicts within trade unions themselves. The anti-union crusades of recent years, both political and mass media, have tried to limit the role of unions, effectively denying the reality of their culture. Since working people rarely find their work experiences reflected in the mass media, this also devalues those experiences and the self-esteem achieved through working.

This is not simply an argument for the recognition of diverse cultural traditions. It also implies a demand for cultural democracy — i.e. some equality between the cultural traditions.

This equality cannot be achieved solely by cultural policy but presupposes some political changes, a factor contributing to the political content of much union culture. In order for cultural traditions of different sectors of society to develop freely, they must first have the conditions to develop freely. An aim of the Art and Working Life programme should be to support such conditions within the labour movement.

Contrary to this, arguments for "excellence in the arts" and "raising the level of appreciation of culture" unwittingly become attempts to neutralise any moves towards cultural democracy. But people are not interested in culture which they cannot relate to, cannot participate in and which does not reflect some of their own needs or experiences.

The success of the Art and Working Life programme rests on trade union initiative.

Just as the skills of artists can contribute to trade union processes, so too can union concerns contribute to enriching artistic traditions. The basis of that interaction is of mutual support, a feeling of interdependence.

At the present there is too little understanding of either community by the other. The commitment of many artists exists only on the most idealistic level: they feel the day-to-day work of a union is not worthy of their concern or talents. There is an example of a recent book on community murals in Australia, produced with tax-payers' money and printed in Japan: in other words, artistically it supports the needs of community and neighbourhood groups, but industrially doesn't support the right to jobs of people in these communities. With a stronger sense of mutual support that kind of contradiction cannot occur.

In societies such as ours, trade unions are the sector which takes the hardest look at the long-term direction in which this country is developing, rather than the short-term of next year's profits or election. They provide the most consistent organisational base to lobby and pressure for conditions guaranteeing the social well-being of future generations. That this places them in many situations of conflict should hardly be surprising, since many forces are working to erode democratic rights, especially of people in their working environments. The role of unions has been to resist and bring about changes in attitudes and policies, forcing governments to enact socially progressive legislation.

Seen in this way, trade unions play a vital role as a creative force within the society — in the longer social and political view, perhaps the most creative. Artists have no monopoly on creativity, neither should creativity be relegated to marginal and politically harmless areas of modern life.

Given proper recognition of their creative role, the activities of trade unions provide a natural basis for developing the cultural dimensions of working life, and therefore of all Australian life. But this means that artists must recognise creative forces greater than their own and that unions more fully acknowledge the cultural basis implicit in their organisations. That is the real basis of mutual support. The success of the Art and Working Life programme depends on the trade union movement being in control and the initiatives developing from their activities.

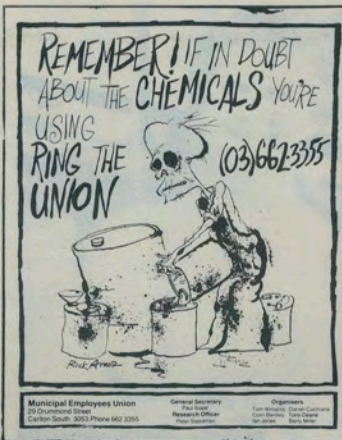
Trade Union Media

Trade union media is often overlooked as an arena of union culture.

Because union journals, newspapers, pamphlets, leaflets, posters, etc., are so much accepted as part of everyday union work, they can seem less important than the 'culture' brought in from the 'outside'. Yet they are the traditional and most widely used means of communicating within the union movement, providing a major forum for reporting industrial issues, for discussion, debate and the development of policies.

However, most unions rarely make the best use of journalism, graphic design and illustrations, and end up selling their own media short. For example, unions often use their own staff as photographers — while this may sometimes be best, given their industrial knowledge and familiarity with the subject, too often the results are repetitively dull and unimaginative images, which reproduce poorly. Few artists are able to get regularly or even occasionally paid (at a fair rate) work producing graphics or photographs for the labour movement. Those with a political commitment to this area of work are often exploited, and even expected to produce for free.

If, on the other hand, unions were prepared to spend (say) ten per cent of their media production costs on commissioning graphics, photography, etc., this would have the effect of (i) providing regular work for a number of artists; (ii) allowing immediate and practical use of their work within existing communication channels, with some critical feedback on the effectiveness of their work; (iii) fostering on-going working relations between artists and unions on practical and productive levels, and (iv) greatly enhancing the effectiveness of the union's communications.



Above
MEU poster
Produced by Rick Amor





The Victorian Trades Hall Council Art Workshop

"The VTHC is in the process of establishing an art workshop. The Trade Union Movement has had a long and important tradition of involvement with the arts. Architecture, monumental art, symbolic images, highly decorated certificates, films and Trade Union banners have been some of the forms which this involvement has taken. The Trades Hall Council Art Workshop reaffirms this tradition and by seeking the participation of workers and their families hopes to extend this tradition in new and innovative ways.

Philosophy: Working people of all ethnic backgrounds with their rich experience and creative talents deserve access not only to the products of artistic work but also to its processes — both mental and physical. It is intended that workers be involved closely with the conceptualisation design and execution of works. By assisting in this work it is hoped we may see the creation of important new artistic forms — forms that go beyond the confines of a specialist art audience and makes an original contribution to the development of Australian culture.

Long term goals: The workshop goes beyond a simple utilitarian function. Its principle aim is to produce work involving workers and their families of a high artistic standard. These will be long term projects of enduring cultural value.

The structure of the workshop is conceived in terms of: an administrative director (VTHC Arts Officer), artistic director, project artist, trainee, part-time assistant, and artists — in — residence (work place and other).

Workshop activities to be phased in as appropriate, are proposed as follows: large scale mural; bill board projects; provision of expertise of interested groups and individuals; banner projects for affiliated unions and associated bodies; classes and workshops in mural painting and related areas (e.g. drawing, photography etc.); documentation and information centre; centralised visual reference collector; provision of lecturers, slides shows etc; planning space and storage facilities; experimental studies; facility to produce mural designs for work places and regional centres; a small library facility; exhibition space; support and advice structure for artists and trade unions working with cultural activities related to the trade union movement; help with artists in residence programme."

Geoff Hogg
February, 1983

Oceania Media Network

"Oceania Media Network is an organisation specialising in audio-visual resources for use in the educational and cultural activities of the trade union movement.

The films, videos and slideshows have been produced specifically for use by unions and focus on issues of immediate interest to workers, such as new technology, occupational health and safety, workers control, unemployment and international struggles for union rights. These do more than simply document particular issues, but provide a framework through which audiences can take the initiative in planning solutions to such problems."

For a copy of their catalogue or more information, contact Oceania Media Network, GPO Box 1391, Sydney, NSW 2001.

Australia Council's Policy

In September 1982 the Australia Council adopted a policy on Art and Working Life.

This policy can be seen as a response by the Council to the resurgence of interest and activity by the trade union movement in arts activities during the preceding ten years, an interest given recognition by the movement itself through the adoption by the ACTU of its policy on Arts and Creative Recreation in 1980.

In adopting a policy on Art and Working Life, the Council also adopted a number of goals and strategies designed to extend and consolidate both trade union involvement in arts development and the Australia Council's support for such development.

In addition, an incentive fund of \$140,000 was established. This fund, available to the Boards of the Council on a matching dollar for dollar basis, was established to encourage the Boards to expand their level of support in this area.

The details of these objectives and strategies are provided later in this article. Adoption of the policy has led to an increased awareness by the Boards of the issues involved in this area. What has emerged is a need for a greater understanding of the constraints facing the trade union movement and arts funding authorities. It is also becoming increasingly important to define more precisely how we should proceed in the implementation of these objectives. This will require more information particularly in relation to:

- The attitudes of various unions towards involvement in arts development;
- The organisational structures and processes through which arts activities have occurred and can occur within the trade union movement;
- The areas within the trade union movement which show the greatest promise of support for arts activity and with which the Council and its Boards should maintain close contact;
- The impact of the Art and Working Life programme on these areas.

The Policy in context

The encouragement, development and support of arts activities by the Boards of the Australia Council in partnership with trade unions began in 1975 with the Community Arts Board. The Board provided, and still does provide, assistance towards the salaries of arts officers attached to peak union organisations, and funds towards the activities conducted by these arts officers. The basis for this support was, in the main, the Board's desire to provide wider opportunities for access to and participation in arts activities, rather than a clear recognition of the need to support art policy and practice which acknowledged working class culture.

In relation to the Australia Council as a whole, while Boards have from time to time provided support to artists whose work draws on popular and craft traditions and the experiences of workers' daily lives for inspiration, there have been no policies which specifically encourage this support.

Funds directed through trade unions have not necessarily been concerned with the recognition and support of working class culture either.

The programmes conducted by trade unions arts officers and supported by the Boards have been, in the main, oriented towards the workplace. While these programmes have sometimes encouraged worker involvement, they have been predominantly concerned with taking the "high arts" to the worker.

Many artists and others working with trade unions have expressed growing concern with this "arts as entertainment/enlightenment" approach.

The efforts of some trade union arts officers to develop programmes which allow the perceptions, concerns and interests of workers to be given due expression and respect have been hampered by their isolation and the view of many peak union organisations that arts development is secondary to the primary objectives of the movement, rather than an integral part.

Considerable funds are spent by trade unions in attempting to communicate with their members and the wider public. In most cases the techniques used are unimaginative and little use is made of the skills of journalists, photographers, songwriters and poster makers, for instance, to publicise and promote important campaigns.

The efforts of committed unions to sustain initiatives in this area are hampered by the lack of structures and resources to ensure continuity. For example, songs written and produced in response to particular campaigns are often not widely distributed. There are also problems of distribution for posters, books and leaflets. Funds for such projects are often raised on a pass-the-hat basis which limits the extent to which successful projects or activities can be followed up.

In adopting its policy on Art and Working Life, the Australia Council has become committed to supporting activities which give expression to the realities and experiences of working people. However, we are hampered in our ability to effectively carry out this policy by a lack of adequate appreciation of the particular problems facing the trade union movement in a period of economic recession. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding of the workings and structure of the trade unions.

This lack of understanding is compounded by the fact that, despite the important role played by unionists Harry Bluck and Wally Curran in the formation of the Australia Council by the Whitlam Government, for many years Council has not had members drawn from or experienced in the trade union movement. Whilst Board and Council members do not represent particular interest groups, every effort is made to appoint people who possess particular knowledge and understanding of the relevant area of arts activity. In view of the Council's objectives to promote access to the arts and a range of forms of cultural expression, it would seem important that the needs of three million trade unionists and their families be reflected in the membership of the Council.

Objectives of the Art and Working Life programme

Council agreed to adopt the following objectives for an Art and Working Life programme and recommended their adoption by the Board for implementation:

- 1 To encourage art practice and policy which is informed by the concerns and issues affecting workers' own lives and which acknowledges working class cultural tradition and the multicultural nature of that tradition;
- 2 to encourage the development of opportunities for workers and their families to gain access to the arts and to enjoy opportunities for creative self-expression and participation;

- 3 to promote communication within the trade union movement and between trade unions, artists and art organisations on cultural policy and practice and working life and to encourage documentation of this practice;
- 4 to encourage community, trade union, private sector, local, State and Commonwealth Government support for programmes and projects related to Art and Working Life.

Strategies for implementation

Council agreed to adopt the following strategies for implementation of the above objectives:

- 1 To give primary emphasis to encouraging trade union involvement in arts activities and to working through the trade union movement in order to implement the above objectives;
- 2 To continue to seek trade union representation on Council and to encourage Boards to take this into account in considering nominations for Board membership;
- 3 To commend to the Boards the policy on Art and Working Life and to encourage them to implement it through:
 - Their programmes of support;
 - Incentive funding to artists and organisations to develop programmes which expose and reflect working class cultural experience and tradition; and
 - To include reference to this policy priority in their brochures, policy statements and other publications.
- 4 To disseminate the Australia Council's policy on Art and Working Life to relevant organisations, individuals and other arts funding/support agencies;
- 5 To set aside an amount of \$140,000 for the 1982/83 financial year to fund programmes and projects in this area.
Moneys from this fund will be made available to the Boards on a matching dollar for dollar basis for specific projects or programmes consistent with the overall objectives of the Art and Working Life programme;
- 6 To monitor the development of the programme over a twelve month period, and to request a report on its progress at the end of that period.

Conclusion

The Australia Council has stated its commitment to support activities which express the realities and experiences of working people.

The ACTU has adopted a policy which recognises the influence the arts have on people's everyday lives.

Given the context in which both policies have been developed, the challenge for both the ACTU and the Australia Council is whether they are able or prepared to move thoughtfully and systematically towards the implementation of their respective policies.

Here are four ways in which we could move forward:

- 1 Establish trade union representation on the Australia Council and its Boards;
- 2 Trade unions and peak union organisations to establish or re-establish their arts committees. These committees could include representatives from interested unions, arts-based unions (e.g. Equity, Musicians) and could also use artists working in this area as advisors;
- 3 Unions could assess the effectiveness of the methods currently used to promote campaigns and communicate with members and re-allocate these funds to employ artists to expand and improve the method used.
- 4 Arts organisations e.g. poster workshops, community printing centres, could extend and develop their market to include trade unions.

Deborah Mills
May 1983

Below

Paint industry: cleaning out paint tins with caustic soda

Bottom

Printing industry: phototypesetter



Re-presenting Work

'Re-presenting Work' is a photographic project initiated by the Lidcombe Workers Health Centre — involving Julie Donaldson, Helen Grace and Warwick Pearse — to document aspects of working life in conjunction with unions and workers. While the emphasis has been on health and safety issues, the project has also had a more general aim of raising questions about the uses of photography, particularly in the workplace.

"Initially a wide range of unions were contacted for support in gaining access to workplaces and in raising funds for the project. A number of unions agreed to support us, both financially and in arranging access. We visit the workplace accompanied by a union organiser and, often, by the workplace delegate as well. We explain the project before taking photos and are prepared to answer any questions that arise as we go. Workers have been enthusiastic when we've had discussions about the fact that a major part of their lives (working life) is not documented by them or for them. Most workplace photography is limited to

management's public relations. Workers often have clear ideas about what they feel should be documented in their workplace.

"When we've finished a session, the film is processed and rollproofs made. The proofs are returned to the workplace to be displayed for everyone to see what we are doing, then distributed to those who were photographed. This practice also gives us information on how the photos are read and what they mean in this context. The project, to date, has also been successful in encouraging workers to use and direct the skills of the photographer and in raising questions about workers taking photos in their workplace and of others at work.

"So far we have visited eleven workplaces, often on several occasions. We are almost finished the major photography for the project and will shortly begin selecting work for the exhibition that will complete the project. The exhibition will initially be at the WHC and will be filed as a resource at the WHC and will be available for use by unions and workers."

How to initiate a project

What kind of projects

Any project may gain support providing it is consistent with the overall objectives of the Art and Working Life programme.

Proposals should be directed to a Board of the Australia Council and must emphasise:

- 1 An attempt to expose and reflect working class cultural activities, experience and tradition; and/or
- 2 An attempt to encourage recognition and awareness among members of trade unions of working class cultural tradition and its contribution to Australian cultural development.

Criteria for projects

Projects will be considered in the light of the criteria laid down by a particular Board. In addition the following criteria will be applied.

- 1 It is essential that there is trade union involvement in the project. This must be in the form of endorsement of the project and must, in addition, include support either in cash or kind. (Support in kind may be in the form of e.g. research provided by a union, organisational and administrative support for activities, the donation of equipment or resources, the provision of studio or working space.)
- 2 The artist or artists involved in the project must demonstrate both a commitment and ability to engage actively with the community in which he/she is proposing to work (i.e. with the social, economic and political conditions which move that community). Projects like festivals need not include artists but other people involved in organising or facilitating activities. The same criteria apply to such persons.

Initiating a project and seeking funding

- 1 Identify the Board which you feel is relevant to your project.
- 2 Contact a project officer of that Board to discuss your proposal.
- 3 Write out a detailed description of the project, also outlining how you see it working in relation to the aims of the programme.
- 4 Estimate a budget, including a breakdown of how funds would be used.
- 5 Indicate how the criteria above are satisfied.

Trade unionists or officials needing assistance in formulating a project should contact the Australia Council and discuss it with a project officer. Project officers can make suggestions on how to develop the project and shape it according to the criteria of the programme; they can help by proposing and/or contacting artists or other people who may be able to participate in or otherwise assist the project; they can offer help in preparing the funding application and working out a budget for the project.

The ACTU Arts Officer, Jean McLean, can also be contacted for advice and assistance. The ACTU Arts Officer would like to be notified of any project proposals and/or funding applications being made by trade unions to the Australia Council. It is also important for unions to notify the ACTU Arts Officer of any union cultural activities and when they are occurring, and to send documentation of the activities. The ACTU is building up a resource of documented examples to assist unions in developing their own projects or programmes. The ACTU Arts Officer can be contacted at the ACTU on (03) 347 3966.

It is also strongly recommended that artists applying for funding under this programme discuss their proposals with a project officer at the Australia Council.

The following people can be contacted at the Australia Council.

Crafts Board	Elaine Diffey	923 3348
Visual Arts Board	Ross Wolfe	923 3418
Literature Board	Irene Stevens	923 3344
Aboriginal Arts Board	Elaine Godden	923 3417
Music Board	Margaret Jovanovic	923 3336
Theatre Board		
Dance	Katherine Beall	923 3335
Drama	Richard Perram	923 3331
Young Peoples Theatre or Puppetry	Mary Travers	923 3370
Community Arts Board	Deborah Mills	923 3422

ACTU Arts and Creative Recreation Committee

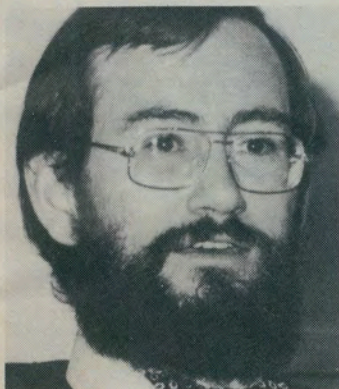
National unions are selected to be represented on the Committee. Provided below are brief backgrounds of some of the people who have been active on the Committee.



Jean McLean
A.C.T.U. Arts Officer, Secretary to the ACTU Arts & Creative Recreation Committee.

One of the most important parts of Jean's job as National Arts Officer is in the promotion of arts and cultural programmes throughout the union movement, and in assisting unions and State branches to carry out these programmes. To help unions achieve this she is also involved in lobbying Federal and State Governments to give greater recognition to workers participation in Arts Programmes. Jean participated in the formulation of the Australia Council Art and Working Life Policy and has been appointed to the Victorian Council of the Arts.

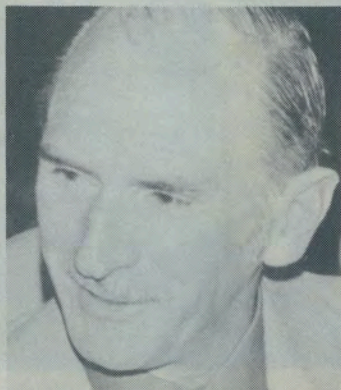
Jean has a long history of interest and involvement in the arts and cultural activities in Victoria. She has been especially involved in the areas of theatre, film and the visual arts and crafts.



Michael Crosby
Michael is the Federal Secretary of Actors Equity of Australia. He was previously employed by Equity as Theatre Organiser and then N.S.W. Secretary. He first joined the union as a child actor in 1960. In both practical and professional terms he has a deep knowledge of the problems faced by Australian performing artists.



Paula Bloch
Paula represents the Australian Teachers Federation on the Committee. Paula currently holds the position of Editor of Publications with the NSW Teachers Federation. She graduated from the National Art School, Sydney, and continued post-graduate studies in Czechoslovakia. Her professional background includes work as a designer, both in Europe and Australia. Paula also taught art before being elected to her position with the union.



Don Cushion
Don joined the Musicians' Union of Australia in 1943 and has been Federal Secretary since 1974. Don has an extensive background of musical experience which includes many years working with dance bands and symphony orchestras, in live performance and on television and radio. He has also been involved in small group entertainment and lunchtime concerts at factories in Tasmania.



Laurie Carmichael
Laurie is Assistant National Secretary of the Amalgamated Metal, Foundry and Shipwrights' Union. He has had a lifelong interest in arts especially in music. He assisted in the drafting of the first A.C.T.U. policy on the Arts and Creative Recreation and presented it to the 1977 Congress. He had a fully-appointed theatre built into the national headquarters of the Amalgamated Metals, Foundry and Shipwrights' Union and he has provided a policy and organisational framework through that union to sponsor a number of arts activities.



Alan Morgan
Alan is the Arts and Recreation Officer for the Victorian Trades Hall Council. Formerly Senior Lecturer in Drama and Education at Rusden State College (now Victoria College), he was the founder President of the National Association of Drama in Education and a member of the Australia Council/Schools Commission Enquiry into Education and the Arts. As Arts and Recreation Officer at the Trades Hall, he is responsible for liaison with government and arts programmes, policy development, community and workplace programmes, and the development of the Trades Hall Council Arts Workshop, which involves artist-in-residence programmes and art and craft exhibitions. He is also a member of the Board of West Theatre Company.



Pat Clancy
Pat is the National Secretary of the Building Workers' Industrial Union of Australia. He was elected to represent the ACTU as a Director of the Board of the Australian Opera Company. He has represented his Union at international conferences involving literature and the performing arts. He has arranged for international artists to perform in Australia, also arranging the first performance on the Opera House Construction Site, Sydney, of the singer Paul Robeson. Pat is keenly interested in securing union involvement in all forms of the arts.



Max Ogden
Max is Education Officer with the Amalgamated Metal, Foundry and Shipwrights' Union. He has been a union activist since apprenticeship days and has always been conscious of the need to link work with the arts. His main interest in the arts has been folk music, jazz and the cinema. As Education Officer for ten years with the AMFSU Union, he has worked to develop activities such as concerts, theatre, poetry readings in workshops, and to initiate factory arts festivals. In the early seventies he was seconded to Trades Hall Council to get the arts programme off the ground. He has also been associated with international tours by such people as Seeger, McColl, Chilean singers Quilapayun, etc.

Right
Sidetrack Theatre
Christian Manon and Anne-Marie Wiles in a scene from "Down Under the Thumb", a play about the pressures of growing up in the suburbs. Sidetrack Theatre researches and produces plays for union-based, ethnic and community audiences.



Above
Tara, "Diesel's" daughter
The sit-in at Preston Extended Colliery, near Gunnedah — see p.13. "On the first day the men went back to work she wanted to go to the mine with her dad. When told no, she couldn't understand why the situation had changed. As far as she was concerned it had been work at the mine for her father for the past 54 days and she didn't realise the difference. Her father was one of the four pit top support crew." *Photo: Warwick Pearse.*



Front cover
Right to Work March
From Wollongong to Sydney, November 1982. The banner was produced by Redback Grafix commissioned by Wollongong Out of Workers Union. *Photo: Ann Stephen.*