

WORKING WOMEN'S POLICY



Congress recognises that the changing role of women in Australian society is characterised by a massive upsurge in the proportion and number of women who work in paid employment. This is due to changing social attitudes and values which are reflected in statistics which demonstrate conclusively this fact.

★ In 1974, 26% of all women and 6.5% of all married women worked. In 1978, 43.9% of all women and 42.4% of married women worked.

★ Women now constitute 36.3% of the total workforce compared with 28.4% fifteen years ago.

★ Married women now constitute 22.3% of the total workforce compared with 13.6% fifteen years ago.

★ The female workforce for the first time in history is predominantly married — almost two-thirds of all women in the workforce are married.

★ 34.8% of all women work part-time and 43.0% of all married women work part-time.

Despite these facts, women employed in the paid workforce in Australia are still not accorded full equality of opportunity and treatment with their male counterparts. Discrimination against women on the grounds of sex persists in a number of forms. It is the objective of the Australian trade union movement, via the full implementation of the Working Women's Charter to eradicate all discrimination against women workers. The ILO has described the

achievement of equal pay as the "1st step towards equality", yet it is clear from ACTU surveys that significant difference occurs between the incomes of male and females, particularly as a result of discrimination in overaward payments and superannuation.

There is a need, in line with the Charter that men and women are treated equally in both the private and public sectors with respect to superannuation. State and Federal Governments must ensure that discrimination ceases immediately with respect to eligibility to join, and benefits payable from their superannuation scheme.

Congress also believes that it is important to counteract the false view that the participation of females in the workforce is the cause of unemployment. The causes of unemployment are complex and the understanding of the problem is not assisted by such simplistic assertions.

Congress recognises that the major economic problem facing our community is unemployment, and

notes that unemployment is greater amongst women and especially young women.

★ The unemployment rate for women is 7.8%.

★ The unemployment rate for females age 15 to 19 years is 21.2%.

Congress, in line with its economic policy, believes that there is a need for a concerted programme to provide the opportunity for every Australian resident who is available for and willing to work to be able to do so.

Congress is basically reaffirming the Working Women's Charter of '77 and recognises the need to continue to publicise and promote the Working Women's Charter within the Australian trade union movement.

Congress believes:

★ Unions should consider conducting conferences of their members to explain and promote the Charter.

★ State Charter Committees of the ACTU should consider conducting conferences on a State basis.

★ Following conferences at State and local levels, the ACTU Working Women's Charter committee should consider holding a national conference on the Charter to act as a focus for national action and review of priorities.

This Congress believes that there is a need to maintain the following priorities of action:

★ The establishment of comprehensive maternity protection,

★ The provision of adequate child care facilities which meet the needs of working parents,

★ The achievement of equal remuneration for work of equal value, and

★ Increased recruitment and involvement of women trade union members.

WORKING WOMEN'S CHARTER

1. ENTRY TO THE WORKFORCE

Education and Training

★ There should be equal opportunity and access to all areas of education and training and retraining.

★ To achieve this objective:

— Females should be made fully aware via vocational guidance throughout the education system of all job options and training courses available to them.

— As a matter of urgency, sex bias of all types in all aspects of the education system should be eradicated.

— In view of the patterns of interrupted employment of many

women workers, special re-training and refresher courses should be made available with financial assistance, regardless of whether the spouse is in full-time employment.

— English classes for migrant workers should be provided on the job. Pictorial and comprehensive multi-lingual information be made available to all migrant workers.

— Active encouragement should be given by the trade union movement to women who wish to enter areas of training, employment and apprenticeships which traditionally have been regarded as male pre-

serves, and women should be urged to seek training and employment in any chosen field of education.

CHILD CARE PROVISIONS

★ The trade union movement must strive for trade union activity and campaign for acceptable child care facilities and for support by Government and Local Government bodies. Trade Unions should participate in the management of such centres which should be at low cost to the parent.

The services to be located in areas of need with flexible hours available for shift workers. Particular attention be given to before

school, after-school (occasional) and school holiday child care.

★ Child care facilities located at workplaces should be under the control of a Union Committee on the job elected by workers concerned, so that this service is not used in any way to intimidate workers.

★ Union should be involved in the establishment of community based child care facilities and also employer or industry based child care facilities where the environment is conducive to such establishment.

★ Fees paid for the care of pre-school children, regardless of

their age, should be tax deductible.

PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION

All pseudo-protective laws related to women's employment should be urgently reviewed by unions. Discriminatory clauses, which restrict entry, should be deleted from awards so that the range of occupations open to female workers is expanded.

Protective legislation should be reviewed with the aim of protecting both male and female workers' health. There should be no deterioration of working conditions in the equalising process.

2. WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

There should be no discrimination exercised at the Commonwealth Employment Service towards persons seeking employment. All unemployed persons should be urged to register with the Commonwealth Employment Service.

EQUAL PAY FOR WORK OF EQUAL VALUE

★ All components of remuneration should apply equally to men and women. Urgent attention should be given by unions to existing differences in total earnings and benefits received by male and female workers performing similar jobs. Equal remuneration should cover items such as equal right to enter and secure a superannuation

scheme on an equal basis over-award payments, production bonuses, etc.

★ All efforts made by employers, including reclassification of female occupations, to circumvent the practice of equal pay, should be highlighted, exposed, vigorously opposed and eradicated by union pressure and through reporting to the Discrimination Committees.

★ The principle of equal pay for work of equal value should be pursued, using objective criteria to ensure that predominantly or exclusively female classifications or occupations are properly valued.

★ Payment of systems by result, which are used to exploit female employees, should be abolished.

PROMOTION

Promotion should be equally accessible and subject to the conditions.

DISCRIMINATION AND REDUNDANCY

There should be no discrimination based on sex or marital status towards retrenchments which should be decided by agreed redundancy procedures.

WORK PATTERN

Introduction of broadly defined flexible working hours where appro-

priate. This concept must be interpreted to include part-time work and tandem employment, and must be subject to appropriate loadings, (benefits, conditions and safeguards).

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Health and safety information which is both multi-lingual and comprehensive to be provided on the job.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Regular medical services including preventive medical care be provided and available data be made accessible to trade unions with approval of members concerned.

MATERNITY AND PATERNITY LEAVE

★ Unpaid maternity and childbearing leave should be granted to all women in paid employment in line with the International Labor Organisation (ILO) Convention 103. Unions should actively pursue maternity leave and paternity leave clauses in awards. These clauses should include provision for a guarantee of re-employment following leave and for an unbroken period of entitlement rights (e.g., leave, promotion).

★ Paid maternity leave in line with ILO Convention 103 is supported by the ACTU.

★ Paid leave be granted for family and personal emergencies.

3. TRADE UNIONS.

Recruitment

Unions should increase activity to recruit more female members and to involve more members in activity to achieve the demands of this Charter.

TRADE UNION EDUCATION

★ Female workers should be actively encouraged by trade unions to attend classes conducted for trade union education purposes which should cater for the special problems and needs of female workers. Such courses should be conducted at places and times suit-

able to the needs and, where the need exists, child minding facilities should be provided.

★ Trade union education should include courses relating to the problems of working women and these courses should be available to both men and women workers.

ORGANISATIONS' ACTIVE ENCOURAGEMENT

The ACTU in co-ordination with other trade union peak councils and

ACTU State Branches, together with affiliated unions, should actively encourage women members to stand for office. Where necessary, positive provisions should be considered to provide specific representation of women to ensure that union executives are fully representative of all its members. Women should also be nominated as delegates on delegations requiring union representation.

It is recognised that some policies supported by the ACTU to achieve equality apply also to male workers. However, until such time that male and female workers have equal responsibility for domestic duties and child rearing, many of these policies must be directed principally towards female workers. The pursuit and achievement of recommendations in this charter should contribute to

the change in attitudes required before equality regardless of sex can prevail in practice.

The ACTU supports, consistent with its policy, the right to paid work for all who want to work, irrespective of age, marital status, sex, sexuality, race, country of origin, religion, political belief, or appearance.