

**AUSTRALIAN UNEMPLOYED  
WORKERS UNION**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2017**

Presenting at Annual General Meeting,  
Melbourne 16th of February 2018



**Australian Unemployed Workers Union**

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## President's Report

Thanks to the tireless work of our volunteers, 2017 was a strong year of growth for the Australian Unemployed Workers' Union.

The AUWUs membership went from 5,846 in January 2017 to 9,940 in February 2018. This spectacular growth shows that people and organisations are starting not only to take notice of our work, but also want to sign up and support us. Our role as the national organisation representing the unemployed has been strengthened.

The basis for this growth has been set up by the tireless work AUWU volunteers do across four key areas - (1) Advocacy; (2) Campaigns; (3) Media and Engagement; and (4) National Structure

### Advocacy

Our National Advocacy Service has grown considerably. On average, we are receiving more calls than we ever have – roughly around ten per day.

In 2017 the AUWU organised its first ever advocacy-training program. This was very well attended and sparked interest from members across the country. Our advocacy volunteers are now better equipped to handle the concerns of callers. The advocacy coordination has been moved out of Melbourne to Perth, which is a good testament of our national expansion. The appointment of our first Industrial Officer has also significantly expanded our capacity to assist callers.

The consolidation of our advocacy work has led to a number of organisations expressing their interest. The AUWU has built great connections with many organisations concerned with the development of the Employment Services System, most notably Per Capita that has agreed to help us write and launch our Advocacy Report this year. This report will also mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the privatisation of job agencies – a great opportunity to deliver our assessment of this punitive and dysfunctional system.

## Campaigns

The AUWU has had a busy year for campaigns.

Given all the ongoing attacks being launched by this government against the unemployed during 2017, it can be difficult determining what issues to run campaigns on.

This year, the AUWU ran a number of campaigns, focusing primarily on the following issues

- Centrelink system (Dignity Not Debt, Dignity Not Drug Tests, National Day of Action Against Welfare Crackdown)
- Income Management
- Job Agencies
- Work for the Dole safety (Justice For Josh)
- Empowering the Unemployed (Advocacy Services, Stop Hate Speech, Jam For Jobs and Justice; and
- Education (Advocacy Course, Right2Work, Your Rights Information).

This work has helped us build our profile and build allies. Through this campaign work, the AUWU has developed good working relations with Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), Anti-Poverty Network, Victorian Trades Hall Council, Per Capita, Jobs Australia, Unitarian Church, National Union of Workers, Community and and Public Sector Union (CPSU), Socialist Alliance, Socialist Party, The Greens, the ACTU and the Australian Labour Party.

This alliance building has been crucial in us being able to achieve a bigger platform in 2017.

## Media and Engagement

In 2017, the AUWU achieved consistent media interest. Thanks to the efforts of our Advocacy team, our Media Officer and other volunteers, the AUWU has been able to get the voices of unemployed workers into the media. Thanks to this work, the AUWU got news stories, in *The Guardian*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Murdoch Media*, *Today Tonight* and a range of other print media.

The AUWU also have a very strong social media presence, and have a reach of around half a million each week through our facebook page alone.

## **National Structure**

In early 2017, the National Executive – then operating out of the Melbourne branch – decided to start a National Branch Coordinating working group. Weekly meetings were held with branch coordinators from each state, except for the Northern Territory. This national branch-coordinating meeting has been crucial in coordinating our national actions and building our national structure. Already it has led to the creation of the seven Guiding principles document that will form the basis of our National Constitution. In early 2018, the national branch coordinator position moved out of Melbourne to Adelaide – another good example of our national expansion.

## **Ongoing Challenges**

While 2017 has been a successful year for the AUWU, there are a number of challenges that will require attention during the coming year. As a very young organisation run entirely by unemployed volunteers, the AUWU has limited resources and, as a result, a number of areas of importance have been neglected. In my capacity as President of the AUWU, I encourage the union to address the following organisations issues in the coming year.

- National Organising Structure

It is an important goal of the AUWU to work towards creating a genuinely national executive with representatives from each state. However, since forming the Melbourne branch executive has functioned as the de facto national executive. Having the national executive based in Melbourne has presented serious restrictions on the development of the AUWU. Given the outstanding growth of the AUWU in 2017, I believe 2018 year presents a great opportunity to take some important steps to build a genuinely democratic national organisation.

- Planning campaigns

One of the greatest challenges facing the AUWU is the sheer number of attacks being waged against the unemployed. As a result, most of the AUWUs campaign work is playing catch up to the latest round of

government attacks and is defensive in nature. While this to a large extent is unavoidable, it is important that the AUWU engage in more strategic planning to ensure we are able to fight the battles that we want to fight. We need to set the agenda.

As part of this, in the coming year we need to hold more planning and strategy meetings, develop realistic goals, ensure all branches are supported and have access to the resources they need, and develop our political lobbying work. The decision of the AUWU executive to hold a conference during Anti-Poverty Week in October presents a good opportunity to bring together AUWU activists from around the country.

- Supporting Our Activists

If the AUWU is to grow its organisation work in 2018, it needs to encourage and support the work of its activists. While 2017 saw an impressive growth in members, the vast majority of these members are not active within the union. It is imperative that the AUWU provide an attractive and easily accessible pathway into the organising work of the union. But it not enough to do this – as a national organising the AUWU has to provide meaningful support to all our activists and branches. It is essential that printed materials and other necessities of campaigning be made available to all AUWU activists.

The Public Action Forum Against the Welfare Crackdown, being held in Melbourne in March, is great opportunity to not only create an exciting pathway into the union, but also support activists in an ongoing way.

The AUWU is well placed to have another great year. With the LNP government trying to dismantle key elements of Australia's social security system and attack the rights and dignity of the unemployed, it is imperative that we provide unemployed worker with an effective platform to fight back

Look forward to another successful year.

Owen Bennett, President

## Secretary's Report

Dear Comrades, as we gather here today on the territory of the Wurrundjeri Peoples, it is fitting to pay respects to the Elders Past and Present who have ably fulfilled Stewardship Responsibilities for millenia. May that honourable task be carried on by future generations of Elders with the Respect and Support of all who reside on these their Lands!

### **Introduction leading to Secretary Duties**

Late 2016 I signed an AUWU petition, including provision of my email address. Early 2017 Owen broadcast invitation for Secretary, so I expressed interest. I believe my first meeting was on Friday 10 March, where I attempted to take some minutes. My involvement increased with invitation to join Executive team and attendance at NUW in Docklands.

### **Legal duties regarding AUWU registration with Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV)**

Gradual realisation of Secretary responsibilities related to our registration with CAV. Hence my attempt to pull together a formal membership list complying with relevant legislation; being names, addresses, emails, Vic Electoral Commission (VEC) enrolment: currently have 13 members who have provided this information.

All such members are deemed to have provided this information in confidence to protect their privacy. A membership entry table is to be available at AGM for any other members to enter their information (including confirmation of VEC status). At AGM or following Branch / Executive Meeting I propose a MOTION confirming the privacy status of our membership list as a safeguard protection from actual / potential victimisation by Job Agencies & Government departments.

### **Inclusion as signatory to bank account & commensurate financial responsibility to donors**

By mid November, I was invited onto Finance sub-committee as joint bank account signatory. With digital access to account history I became aware of numerous members' and supporters' donations. As an Office Bearer / Trusted Servant I recognise our collective responsibility to prudent management of these funds, held on behalf of our members (and clients / potential members).

## **Going Forward [including hand-over to succeeding office bearer(s)]**

Having received a request for membership data, I have become aware of such information (together with Constitution / Mission Statement documents), having (as it were) somewhat slipped through the cracks in prior handover. I look to helping improve the smooth transfer of AUWU foundation information to future Office Bearers.

Aside from our timely reporting to CAV as required by their legislation, I see AUWU as continuing to support and be responsive to clients and members through the core tools of Advocacy Hotline and our updated Rights Booklet.

We have also been invited to host the 2018 Anti Poverty Week Conference (previously held in Adelaide, where in 2017 we funded representatives attend from Melbourne & Sydney). In discussion of this event with a friend, he pointed out that such a Conference should not be necessary in a wealthy nation such as ours. This is a sad testament to the rich and powerful who have manipulated this country's economic system and eroded the rights and reasonable expectations of ordinary members of our once egalitarian and democratic community over recent decades.

The next Federal Election is due within slightly over a year. We have much work to do lobbying on behalf of unemployed and under-employed people generally. A great concern is forced "Work for the Dole" projects being used to undermine the rights of all Australian citizens to meaningful employment and commensurate full living incomes with full spiritual, financial and participation rights within the context of the first world country I was born into over sixty years ago. As I move into 'elder' status I view the legacy being passed to our younger citizens as seriously flawed and eroded from the times of hope brought on with the 1972 election of Gough Whitlam. We need to reinvent empathy and inclusion as essential to the well-being of Australia and our young citizens.

As a harbinger of change for the better, AUWU has a major responsibility to be at the forefront of pushing the case for compassion towards our disadvantaged and disenfranchised bruthas and sistas.

Yours in Solidarity, Peace and thankyou

William Schaefer, Secretary



## Treasurer's Report

Financial Year July 1 2016 – June 30 2017

In bank June 1 2016	4275.00
Income	7855.21
Expenditure	-1211.30
In bank July 1 2017	10,918.91

The AUWU has no assets or liabilities.

This last year has been one of expansion and consolidation with a growth in both membership and activity, including the formation of branches in several states. In early 2017, to meet the operational needs of this growing organisation, a set of protocols for the financial management of the AUWU was developed and trialled.

Following feedback from members and Branches a new set of protocols has been developed. These will be discussed and ratified by the new AUWU Committee then distributed for adoption by new Branches following the Annual General Meeting.

As in past years, the work of the AUWU has been enabled and supported by many individuals and organisations and, without their help; the organisation would not have been able to grow and our work would not have been able to continue. In particular, the regular continuing support provided by the National Union of Workers and the Victorian Trades Hall Council has been invaluable.

Anne Learmonth  
Treasurer

## Event Organiser's Report

### Jam for Jobs & Justice

On Sunday 30th July 2017 the Australian Unemployed Worker's Union held a successful and enjoyable fundraiser at the Bella Union Bar, Trades Hall, Carlton. This featured the bands Hornstars, Moreland City Marching Band, Reds under the Bed, Tessa Marshall and the Ultra Conservative Neoliberal Right Wing Good Time Gals. Money raised for the union's work through ticket sales and a wonderful raffle in which AUWU members donated a mountain bike, creative art works and other

items. Bella Union Bar was a great help organising the event and their sound engineer was very generous and adaptable in accommodating the various performers' needs.

The Jam for Jobs & Justice will be remembered for its relaxing community ambience and fun which went together with an important speech by AUWU president Owen Bennett about the union's ongoing fight with the Government and the privatised job agencies. Owen introduced guests to the work of AUWU and a number of newcomers joined the union. We plan to hold more such events in 2018 which celebrate arts activism, excellent music and songwriting, hospitality and fundraising for our cause - to empower unemployed workers and welfare recipients to fight back in solidarity with the AUWU for a fair go.

### **National Day of Action against the welfare crackdown**

On Saturday 3rd February 2018 the Australian Unemployed Workers' Union held events in Melbourne, Bendigo, Sydney and Adelaide to protest the Coalition government's attempt to pass two Bills through Parliament. These Bills (the Welfare Reform Bill and Cashless Debit Card Bill) expand the discredited cashless welfare system and the dangerous Work for the Dole program; increase the waiting period for Newstart; as well as increasing financial penalties for the unemployed and giving private job agencies increased power to make and enforce compliance decisions. The Melbourne gathering outside the State Library in Swanston St, was designed to inform the public of the shocking plight of unemployed workers while showing people how to flood the mailboxes of crossbench MPs & Senators to get them to vote down the Bills. Around 50 people attended the event where the AUWU, guest speakers Father Bob Maguire, Socialist Alliance, Fair Go for Pensioners, the Homeless Person's Union and passionate open mic contributors made the informal and hospitable event a great success.

Other speakers represented Homeless Person's Union, and the campaign to stop the spread of the cashless welfare card. Members of the new Frankston Branch of the AUWU, were also provided great support. Poetry and bowls of grapes provided variety and hospitality to the event.

Interviews with local media (3CR Green Left Weekly and Solidarity Breakfast) spread the word about this event which was streamed to the AUWU social media website. Work done behind the scenes on the leaflet, letter templates, petitions and printing and on organising the PA

system was very much appreciated. The AUWU thanks everyone for getting together to make this event happen at short notice.

More of these friendly informative events are planned to welcome new members and increase awareness of the vicious attacks on our social security system which we must work together to fight against and change.

Valerie Farfalla, AUWU Executive Member

## State Branch Coordination Reports

### Victoria

In Victoria the AUWU has 2034 members in December (previously 1519) and 9 branches. Melbourne, Ballarat and Bendigo are among the branches that have regular meetings. Victorian branches have recently undertaken a number of actions and events, including running the Advocacy course in Melbourne. The Victorian State Branch Coordinator is currently Owen Bennett.

[vicbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com](mailto:vicbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com)

### South Australia

In South Australia, the AUWU has 822 (previously 623 members) and has two branches and are consolidating. The AUWU is working closely with the Anti-Poverty Network in Adelaide who are doing great work fighting for the rights and dignity of unemployed and pensioners. The new state branch coordinator for South Australia is Hayden Patterson (0408 361 360) [sabranhcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com](mailto:sabranhcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com)

### New South Wales / ACT

In NSW and ACT, the AUWU currently has 2102 members (previously 1076) and 17 branches. The Sydney and Newcastle branches hold regular meetings. Inner West Sydney branch will be focusing on building a national day of action against the cashless welfare card in early 2018. It then plans to follow Anti-Poverty Network SA's example by pressuring local councils to come out in favour of raising Newstart. The State Coordinator is Chris Parish (0415 073 898)

[nswbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com](mailto:nswbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com)

### Western Australia

In Western Australia, the AUWU has 644 Members (previously 292) and three branches which are consolidating. The Perth branch holds regular meetings. The State Branch Coordinator of WA is Alan  
[wabranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com](mailto:wabranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com)

### Tasmania

In Tasmania, the AUWU has 279 members (previously 166 members) and three branches which are consolidating. The Tasmanian branch has been doing some extensive work meeting with local members and leafleting. The State Branch Coordinator for Tasmania is Russell.  
[tasbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com](mailto:tasbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com)

### Queensland

In Queensland the AUWU has 1889 (previously 864 members) and 12 branches. Brisbane branch holds regular meetings. The branch has been actively opposing the Indue Cashless card and a number of rallies have been held outside Indue's head office in Brisbane. The state branch coordinator for Queensland is Dylan.  
[qldbbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com](mailto:qldbbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com)

### Northern Territory

In Northern Territory, the AUWU has 39 members (previously 26) and are in the process of building a branch in Darwin. Currently there is no state branch coordinator for the NT. If you are interested in this position, please write to: [nationalbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com](mailto:nationalbranchcoordinator@unemployedworkersunion.com)

## Branch Reports

### Inner West Sydney

In February 2017 the branch was set up with its first action being a letter to the PM and relevant Minister demanding a rise in welfare payments and an increase in jobs This was also used as a form letter for others to sign. By March activities broadened into organising a workshop and an instruction sheet on submitting to the Robodebt enquiry and attending a rally and distributing AUWU flyers.

Over the next five months, Branch activities started by organising a rally following the death of a young man on the Work for the Dole program. Representatives from ISJA, Greens, Labor, Unions NSW, Socialist Alliance and ACOSS spoke followed by open mic. This was followed by a wide variety of activities including distributing flyers about proposed drug testing of jobseekers and a social barbeque for members organised with supportive unions.

Letters were sent to politicians at local, state and federal level over issues ranging from drug testing of welfare recipients, Robodebt letters, 'AFP intimidation on Centrelink website and the Cashless Debit Card rollout to blocking Work for the Dole on a community centre site. Supportive responses to the union's actions over Robodebt debacle were received from Greens and Labor politicians.

In addition to all this the Branch made written submissions to three Government inquiries into Robodebt, Modern Slavery and Cashless Welfare and continued with letter writing, visiting parliamentarian's offices, seeking their support for AUWU positions and raising issues of concern.

Other actions included a small but very public protest about hate speech against jobseekers on TV, which attracted a lot of attention from passers-by and led to positive media coverage.

The three-day phone advocacy course in Melbourne was attended by two branch members who then started working shifts on the Advocacy Hotline.

Actions over the final three months of the year included providing advice and support to members having problems with their Job Service Agency (JSA); holding more stalls outside JSAs and signing up new members; and attending and speaking at rallies, on local radio and at a conference. Recently a focus has been on networking with various activist groups and individuals, NGOs, politicians, union members the many people met through the Branch's wide range of activities across Sydney. As a local member said of the advocacy of the Inner West Sydney Branch

“Thank you for your professionalism, friendship,  
guidance and sticking with me through this”

Josie Evans, Inner West Sydney Branch

## Analysis of Member Feedback

In January 2018, the AUWU sent out an online survey to all members asking for feedback on the activities of the AUWU. There were 14 respondents to the survey with 10 stating that they were AUWU members. This response, although small, does provide some useful insights into the involvement of members in the activities of the AUWU and some ideas about future activities to be considered in the coming months.

Postcodes showed that all were Victorian, mostly from Melbourne but one each from Geelong and Gippsland.

Three people did not respond to the question “What branch are you a member of?” Four were not sure or did not know; one reported belonging to the Gippsland Branch and six stated they were Melbourne Branch members.

Answers to the question “Please provide details of your AUWU activity in 2017” ranged from no answer to an ‘interested onlooker’ and some-one who had contacted AUWU with a complaint about the Disability Employment Services Agency. However, other respondents listed ongoing activities such as founding a branch; doing the course and working on the advice line; talking on 3CR; and becoming local activists.

Of the list of priorities (6 plus other) in the question “What demand should the AUWU prioritise in 2018” Increase Newstart rated highest (3), the three options to Abolish Privatised job Agency System, Cashless Welfare and the punitive Eligibility Requirements for Centrelink tied on 2 votes each. Significantly Job Creation and Abolishing work for the Dole got no votes. Two respondents opted not to prioritise with one stating “all items are of equal importance.” One person used the “Other” option to suggest “a pension payment rate for sick Newstart recipients.”

Reasons why people who were AUWU members included believing in the work the organisation is doing; an opportunity to voice concerns about government’s “wrong doing in this corrupt system”; and to advocate for the unemployed.

Finally, respondents were asked to select, from 3 options, the most important work the AUWU does. The rather surprising results were

Political Lobbying – (7), Advocacy Service (4) and Building a Community of Unemployed (3).

Although the small response cannot be considered to be statistically reliable it does provide some information that will be useful in developing the strategic plan for the next year.

Anne Learmonth, Treasurer

## **Advocacy Hotline Annual Report 2017**

2017 has seen yet another increase in the number of people needing the support and advice of the National advocacy hotline.

We now receive and deal with over 150 phone calls and emails per month, with the majority being in regard to the mistreatment and harassment of our members in their dealings with Job and disability service providers and their agents.

This rise in demand for help from our membership will be met with an increase in the extension of operating phone line hours and the addition of more professional advisers, specialising in various Centrelink departmental allocations of services, ie, Newstart, Disability's, Pensions, Carers, CDP and Single Parenting.

We would like to acknowledge the wonderful support shown by all our past and present volunteers. We thank them for all their help over the past year, for it would not be possible to carry out the great work we do without them.

John Windus, Advocacy Coordinator

## **Social Media Annual Report 2017**

Whilst 2017 saw the social media presence of our Union increase, we have seen in 2018 with our most successful campaign to date, "Operation February Flood". This has been a huge campaign for us, with a combination of Social Media information and support, various Petitions, Email/ letter writing directly to MP's and Senators, Joint support from other community groups and Unions and finally the National Day of Action rally's.

This Huge Campaign has seen our social media presence almost double, with us now being viewed by over half a million people each week.



With our Twitter account due to be relaunched with-in weeks, we hope to see those numbers double again in the coming months. Again, this shows the need for the ongoing help and support for our membership.

John Windus, Facebook coordinator



# OUR DEMANDS

- **Raise all Centrelink benefits to the Henderson Poverty Line (\$517/week)**
- **Abolish Work for the Dole**
- **Abolish income management and other discriminatory practices**
- **Remove eligibility requirements (means testing) for social security**
- **Reinstate the CES and abolish the privatised employment services industry**
- **Undertake extensive government-run job programs**  
**(ie. Job Guarantee Program)**
- **Secure employment for all workers**
- **Enforce the minimum wage and Award conditions in every workplace**
- **Reduce the working week to 35 hours**
- **Lower the retirement age to 60**