

**AUSTRALIAN UNEMPLOYED  
WORKERS UNION**

**President and Treasurer's ANNUAL  
REPORT 2018**

Presenting at Annual General Meeting,  
Melbourne 30th of November, 2018



**Australian Unemployed Workers Union**

## President's Report

I would like to start by acknowledging all the incredible work done by our volunteers – many of who are unemployed themselves. These are the tireless volunteers who work for us every day for no reward – our advocacy officers, our advocacy coordinators, our social media officers, our media officers, our committee members, our branch coordinators, our campaigners – and these are only the official positions. I would like to thank you all – without you the AUWU would not exist. Everyday I am inspired by how our volunteers manage to juggle both living in poverty with fighting against poverty and oppression. It is what makes us a unique organisation – we are one of the few social justice organisations in which all of our elected officials and volunteers are directly experiencing the oppression and injustices that they are fighting. This keeps us honest and, unlike so many organisations in the past, ensures we never lose touch with our members – the unemployed workers of Australia. We are by the unemployed and for the unemployed – and always will be.

Because we are by definition a unique organisation – we are the first national unemployed workers union ever to exist in Australia – every year we are making history. We are adding a new chapter into Australia's rich history of unemployed workers union activism – a history that goes right back to the Great Depression where right here in Melbourne, the Unemployed Workers Movement had thousands of active members and successfully fought to government on issues such as Work for the Dole, Job Creation and Raising the rate of their entitlement. We are carrying on this fight – and taking it into new directions. The victories achieved by the Unemployed Workers' Movement did not just benefit unemployed workers – it benefited the entire working class. This is something that was well understood at the time: an attack on an unemployed worker is an attack on all workers. This understanding led to around the organised labour movement fighting against – and defeating – unemployment for nearly 40 years during our period of full employment. Unfortunately, in the 1970s the importance of fighting unemployment was lost, to the detriment of the all working class people. It is our task to ensure convince our working class comrades to pick up this struggle once more. After such a great year, I firmly believe we are one step closer to achieving this.

Thanks to the tireless work of our volunteers right across the country, 2018 has been another great year of growth and consolidation for the AUWU. In the nine months since our last AGM in February, our membership has increased from 9,940 to 13,290 - an increase of 25%. This strong growth in members is in line with the overall trends - since forming in 2015, the AUWU has averaged 3,322 new members each year. That averages out at around 9 new members per day. For a volunteer run organisation like ours to achieve such a consistently high level of membership growth in spite of our minimal resources and campaigning capacity represents a massive achievement of which everyone involved with the AUWU should be very proud.

When we started the AUWU around four years ago, we had our work cut out for us. The Abbott government had just been elected and as part of its first federal budget proposed that unemployed workers should be kicked off their social security entitlements for six months of the year. While this proposal was ultimately voted down, that such naked cruelty towards unemployed workers could be proposed within a federal budget was indicative of the political establishment's deeply ingrained punitive attitude to unemployed. With the myth of the 'dole bludger' being used across the Australian political landscape, 2015 was an increasingly difficult political environment for an unemployed workers' activists - let alone the country's first national Unemployed Workers' Union - to operate.

Not only have we been able to run effective campaigns and advocacy programs, over the last four years we have contributed to a significant shift in public and governmental attitudes around unemployment. When the AUWU first started, it was commonplace for people to be confused and even offended upon hearing about the existence of AUWU. Today, people overwhelmingly see the need for our organisation and is pleased that we are actively fighting for the rights and dignity of unemployed workers. This shift has also taken place within government. In July 2017 last year, Minister for Employment Michaelia Cash publicly attacked the AUWU, stating that "Australian taxpayers and indeed those looking for work would be offended by a 'union' whose sole purpose appears to be keeping members out of gainful employment and encouraging them to shirk their responsibilities." Earlier this year, the Department of Jobs and

Small Business agreed to meet with AUWU regularly in order to listen to our concerns about the punitive employment services system - making us the first national unemployed workers organisation in Australian history to develop a working relationship with a federal government.

The fact that the AUWU is consistently attracting members and is being taken serious as political force is testament to the hard work done by our volunteers across the country. The majority of this work has taken place across four key areas: (1) Campaigns; (2) Advocacy; (3) National Structure. I will now provide a brief summary on these four key areas. I should say that as we held our last AGM in February 2018, I will be focusing this report on what we have been up to since then.

## **Campaigns**

The campaign work done by AUWU in 2018 has been inspiring. The tireless work by our campaigners generally falls into one of the following two areas: (1) empowering unemployed workers; and (2) Lobbying for change. I will now summarise our activities on both these important fronts.

### 1. Empowering unemployed workers

Empowering unemployed workers is, and always will be, the core work of the AUWU. This year was significantly as we expanded our work in this area by travelling across the country to meet members, key state branches, unemployed workers, politicians and allies. As president I travelled around the country and ran job agency fight back information and training sessions in Geelong, Sydney (twice), Adelaide (twice), Perth, Hobart, Frankston and Brisbane. As a result of this campaign, we were able to distribute our campaign literature – particularly regarding our Dump Your Demerit and Boycott Work for the Dole campaigns. Due no small part to our campaign, in October the Department reported that 50% of people successfully dumped their demerits.

In August, our national branch coordinator Hayden Patterson organised a bus trip to Whyalla and Ceduna to talk to unemployed workers and members about their experiences within the punitive income management and Community Development Programs. Forums were held in both Whyalla and Ceduna to discuss the experiences of unemployed workers.

Our media officer Jeremy Poxon also attended and gave several media interviews. More recently, Hayden travelled to Perth, Brisbane and Sydney to provide support our members and branches.

We also expanded our lobbying work and ran three campaigns targeting ALP and Coalition members. These campaigns included Bring Banks Your Budget. 'It's Time' to Raise Newstart, National Day of Action against Cashless Welfare and the Justice4Josh campaign. These events included rallies outside the offices of Julia Banks and Kelly O'Dwyer, in addition to a choir performance of 'It's Time'. The Julia Banks campaigns was covered by the guardian. As part of Newstart campaign, AUWU members successfully lobbied three separate councils (Maribyrnong, Moreland and Newcastle) to commit to advocate for raise Newstart to the Henderson poverty line – the first time that the Henderson poverty line had been used as part of that demand.

As has fast become a tradition within the AUWU, in April we held an event commemorating the two year anniversary of the tragic death of Josh Park Fing at this Work for the Dole site, with speeches from Adam Bandt (Greens), Lisa Chesters (ALP), Simone Casey (Jos Australia) and Dr. (CFMEU). This campaign achieved extensive media coverage in the Guardia and Buzzfeed media outlets.

We held several conferences this year, including a public action form against welfare crackdown in March, the aforementioned JusticeForJosh conference and our first Anti-Poverty Week event, a public forum on Forced Income Management, and our first Anti-Poverty Week event, the Activist Expo: From Stigma to Dignity which included speakers from the Brotherhood of St Lawrence, GetUp!, Per Capita and First Nations Workers Alliance.

In addition to these events and campaigns, this year the AUWU also ran a number of online campaigns designed to mobilise our members through digital activism. This has become an increasingly active area for the AUWU as many of our members are unable to attend events and rallies. Our February Flood campaign was clear example of the power of online activist. In this campaign, we encouraged our members to use our templates to write emails to the cross bench urging them to block the welfare reform bill and the cashless card legislation. While these bills

eventually passed, the response was overwhelming – we were part of the reason why the Welfare Reform Bill did not pass the first time around.

Following on from the success of our February Flood, in July we launched an online campaign calling for unemployed workers to submit to the Employment Services Review panel and the ACOSS survey. In August we launched our ‘December Deluge’ online campaign, urging our members to make a submission to the Senate inquiry into jobactive. This was a particularly rewarding campaign for the AUWU as the inquiry was a result of our work with Greens Senator Rachel Siewert and we were responsible for writing the terms of reference.

Another of the many highlights of our online campaign work was the launch of the Report the Rort online Newsletter. This newsletter included four stories of job agency abuse and mistreatment from our forum, a report from our hotline, a snapshot of unemployment (including the last data on the ratio of job seekers per job vacancy, the rate of Newstart in relation to the poverty line, and penalties imposed on unemployed workers), in addition to the latest information on our campaigns. This brilliant and informative newsletter marked the first time we started engaging with our members on a regular basis, and had led to a significant increase of activity on our online forum, auwustories.

Other online campaigns included:

- No Forced Farm Labour Petition (2,192 signatures)
- Shut Down Work for the Dole Petition (just under 4,000 signatures)
- Establish Senate Inquiry in Jobactive (1,350 signatures)
- Oppose welfare reform bill (1,100 signatures)
- Introduce Adequately Staffed, Free Call Centrelink Number (550 signatures)
- Dial Dan / Contact Keenan campaign encouraging unemployed workers who cannot contact centrelink to contact the Minister of Human Services

- Contact the Ombudsman campaign encouraging unemployed workers complain to the Commonwealth Ombudsman about their employment service provider to

## 2. Lobbying for Change

This year for the first time ever we embarked on an extensive campaign to lobby politicians to end the government's punitive approach to unemployed workers. Unlike previous years, to make our lobbying as effective as possible we commissioned the progressive Think-Tank to co-write a report into the employment services system. As part of this report, we conducted 7 focus groups with unemployed workers in Toowoomba, Sydney, Melbourne, Geelong, Adelaide, Hobart and Perth. At these focus groups we gathered conclusive evidence that the government's unemployment policy is both dysfunctional and punitive. In the final report, we made a clear set of recommendations to government, including the establishment of a commonwealth ombudsman, the introduction a job guarantee, and taking away all compliance powers from front line employment services staff so they can actually provide proper employment services. This report - released in September at a launch event at the Morris Blackburn offices - was covered on ABC radio and within the Fairfax media. It has also attracted interest from a range of groups including ALP, the Greens and GetUp!, and has become the blueprint for lobbying politicians.

Below is a list of federal politicians that we have met with:

- Jenny Macklin (ALP)
- Bill Shorten (ALP)
- Bob Katter
- Ed Husic (ALP)
- Lisa Chesters (ALP)
- Adam Bandt (Greens)
- Rachel Siewert (Greens) (Who we met with monthly)
- Don Farrell (ALP) (Who we met with regularly and has offered us resources)
- Kate Ellis (ALP)
- Rebekha Sharkie (Centre Alliance) (Who we meet with monthly and has offered us resources)

- Terri Butler (ALP)

Below is a list of state politicians that we have met with.

- Francis Bedford (Independent SA)
- Nat Cook (SA ALP)
- Eddie Hughes (SA ALP)
- Michelle Linsink (Liberal ALP)
- Stephen Wage (Liberal ALP)

Below is a list of the NGOs that we have met with and are developing ongoing relationships:

- ACOSS
- ACTU
- Anti Poverty Network
- Australian Progress
- CFMEU
- CPSU
- ETU
- First Nations Workers Alliance (FNWA)
- GetUp!
- Geelong Trades Hall
- NCOSS
- NTCOSS
- Maxima
- Mosaic
- MUA
- Per Capita
- QCOSS
- Relationships Australia
- SACOSS
- Social Security Rights Victoria
- St Vincent de Paul
- Tenants Action Group



- Uniting Communities (SA)
- Uniting Communities (WA)
- Uniting Country (SA)
- Unions NSW
- Victorian Trades Hall Council
- Workers Group for Aboriginal Rights
- WACOSS

In addition to our work lobbying politicians and community organisations, we have also made submissions to 3 official government inquiries and have been requested to appear X. Below is a list of the reports and submissions made by the AUWU in 2018:

- August 2018: [Submission to Future Employment Services](#)
- August 2018: [Submission to the Select Committee on Poverty of the South Australian Legislative Council](#)
- April 2017: [Submission to the Senate Inquiry on the Robo Debt Issue](#)
- September 2018: [Working it Out: Employment Services in Australia \(Joint Report with Per Capita\) and National Advocacy Hotline Yearly Report, 2016-2018](#)
- AUWU Ceduna Report (upcoming)

To develop more research around unemployment, we are also working with several academics out of universities across Australia, including Melbourne University, Australian National University (ANU) and Curtin University (WA). We were also invited to sit on the ACOSS/University of New South Wales Poverty and Inequality Partnership Advisory Panel.

We were also invited to speak at or attend the following conference:

- ACOSS National Conference
- Anarchist Bookfair
- Anti-Poverty Network Conference
- Brotherhood of St Lawrence Conditionality Conference
- Ethnic Community Council of Victoria State Conference
- Feel.Think.Flow Youth Conference

- People's Health Assembly IV in Bangladesh (Peoples Health Movement)
- Jobs Australia National Conference
- QCOSS State Conference
- Unitarian Church

## Advocacy

Thanks to the incredible work of our volunteers across Australia, the AUWU offers free advocacy services to all unemployed workers. These advocacy services include a 9 – 5pm hotline service, an email service and regularly updated unemployed workers rights guide. This is the core work for the AUWU. For many unemployed workers dealing with the employment services system, these services are a life-line. Without them, I am sure many people would have given up trying to receive what they are entitled to. I am constantly inspired by the volunteers – many of them unemployed themselves – who are able to consistently help unemployed workers through an extremely difficult period in many cases fighting the same battles themselves.

The fact that our advocacy work can simultaneously assist people and help us collect data about the reality of being unemployed is one of the great strengths of the union. This data gives us something no other organisation has – up to date information on what is happening on the ground within the employment services system. No organisation can argue with that kind of information. This year, by releasing our advocacy report with Per Capita, we have successfully managed to get this invaluable information into the hands of senior government and department figures. Below is the advocacy report we published as part of our Working It Out Report with Per Capita:

The AUWU hotline data is based on a sample of 234 calls and 81 advocacy form inquiries occurring over the last 12 months. Callers can raise more than one issue. The breakdown of the issues raised are as follows:

DESCRIPTION OF ISSUE	PERCENTAGE OF CALLS RAISING ISSUE
Unemployed Workers Rights Not Explained	68%
Local Labour Market Not Canvassed	61%
Bullying	42%
Very Poor Experience with Job Agency	40%
Basic Services Not Provided	34%
Forced to Attend Unfair Amount of Appointments	33%
Very Poor Experience with Job Agency	40%
Unfairly Forced into Work for the Dole	24%
Forced to Sign Job Plan	22%
Forced to Submit Too Many Job Searches	18%
Medical Condition Not Recognised	17%
Forced into Unsuitable Work	14%
Forced to Produce Payslips	14%
Denied Reasonable Notice for Appointments and Activities	13%
Denied Right to do Voluntary Activity	12%
Poor Experience with Job Agency	12%
Privacy Not Being Respected	11%
Doctor Certificate Rejected	10%
Denied Right to Transfer Agencies	9%
Forced to Attend Unfair Amount of Activities	9%
Forced into Dangerous Situation	6%

This year also marked the first time we have attempted a fundraising drive to assist our advocacy. As a result of this campaign we successfully raised \$13,000 in grants and donations purely for our advocacy service. At the moment we are starting to redevelop the advocacy service to include a 1800 free call number, chat bot, better technology and message back service. We are still waiting to hear back from a number of potential supporters, including NUW and GetUp

### **National Structure**

This year, we were accepted into the Progress Labs program. This program – run by our friends at Australian Progress – taught a number of our members about the basics of running an organisation. As referred to earlier, it also improved our fundraising skills and helped us raise a record \$15,000 in this year alone. These skills will allow us to develop a much greater capacity for fundraising next year. As part of this program, myself and a number of other AUWU committee members were given invaluable information about how to solidify our national structure. These

new skills has allowed us to build a plan for national registration, which is something we will be bringing to the new committee once it is elected.

Some other achievements in building our national structure:

- State division coordinators met regularly, with each coordinator providing reports. Northern Territory is now represented
- Have developed a more inclusive process by building up state branch contacts and giving people access to a centralised emailing process.
- The Committee passed the position descriptions
- The Committee created the national Steering Committee to handle urgent issues
- National campaigns committee created to give campaigners more freedom to develop campaigns
- Nominations committee established to streamline process of appointing members into positions
- AGM election and nomination process opened up to the national membership

### **Ongoing challenges**

While this year has been an amazing year of growth for the AUWU, there are a number of ongoing challenges that have to be addressed for the AUWU to realise its potential. This is going to be important work for the Committee over the next year. Below is a list of the challenges I regard as requiring urgent attention by the next Committee:

- **Legal structure and Governance**

As an incorporated association registered in Victoria, the AUWU does not have national legal structure. This is a major impediment to us ensuring standardised governance practices across the union and obtaining the charity status necessary to applying for grants. This issue has been

something we have tried to address this year and we have almost finished a new draft of the constitution to deal with these matters. Finalising this constitution and national registration process will be one of the core tasks of the next Committee.

- **Strategy**

A key problem with the AUWU is that our campaign and advocacy work has always been playing catch up to government policies. We have failed to set the policy agenda by developing a brought 12-18 month strategy plan of what we want to achieve.

- **Budget**

Similar to our failure to make and stick to a strategy plan, we have also failed to create detailed budgets for our operations. This is really essential to make sure branches and members know what kind of support we can offer them.

- **Volunteering**

The AUWU relies on volunteers to function. Therefore, for us to operate we have to support our volunteers. However, unfortunately, we have failed to create a coherent volunteer structure that supports our volunteers. This

- **National Structure**

One of the goals of the 2018 was to encourage each state division to set up its own executive team and for that team to be represented on the national committee. While we have taken important steps into that direction, we still need to do that work.

- **Core-Team**

One of the challenges this year was people on the committee not attending meetings, particularly in the second half of the year. For the AUWU to function as best as it can, we need to have a core team at its centre who are meeting regularly. Ensuring a core team of committee members who are meeting regularly will be an important focus for 2019

Despite these challenges, the AUWU is at the cusp of becoming a formidable national force in Australian politics. Our growth and media profile is the envy on many organisations within the sector.

I look forward to another great year.

In solidarity

Owen Bennett  
President

# Balance Sheet

---

## Australian Unemployed Workers' Union Inc. As at 30 June 2018

30 Jun 2018      30 Jun 2017

### Assets

<b>Bank</b>		
AUWU Inc	18,599	10,919
<b>Total Bank</b>	<b>18,599</b>	<b>10,919</b>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>18,599</b>	<b>10,919</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>18,599</b>	<b>10,919</b>

### Equity

Current Year Earnings	7,680	6,644
Retained Earnings	10,919	4,275
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>18,599</b>	<b>10,919</b>