



Operations Committee Report Back to Members

**Annual General Meeting
2020**

On behalf of the Operations Committee we acknowledge that we organise from the stolen and unceded lands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We commit to decolonisation and organise against punitive and racist social security policies, like the Community Development Program, the Basics Card and the Cashless Welfare Card.

This always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

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Executive Summary

About the Operations Committee

The Operations Committee (OC) is responsible for carrying out day-to-day administration and Operations of the union, as well as ensuring the delivery of our services. The OC consists of a team of coordinators that represent the four permanent operational working groups/sub-committees of the union, as well as two representatives from the ALL-AUWU and the National Operations Coordinator. The OC works with the other two arms of the union - the National Branch Structure and the Committee of Management - to build our movement, win for our members, and protect the interests of all unemployed, underemployed, and unwaged workers.

As with everyone in the union, all Operations Committee members are volunteers and dedicate their free time to contribute to our movement.

Members of the Operations Committee 2020



Alex North
National Operations
Coordinator



Tracey Smallwood
National Advocacy
Coordinator



Wyndham Morland
Interim National
Division Coordinator



Kristin O'Connell
Communications
Co-Coordinator



Jay Coonan
Senior Policy Adviser



Bailey McCracken
Interim National
Division Secretary



Jez Heywood
Communications
Co-Coordinator



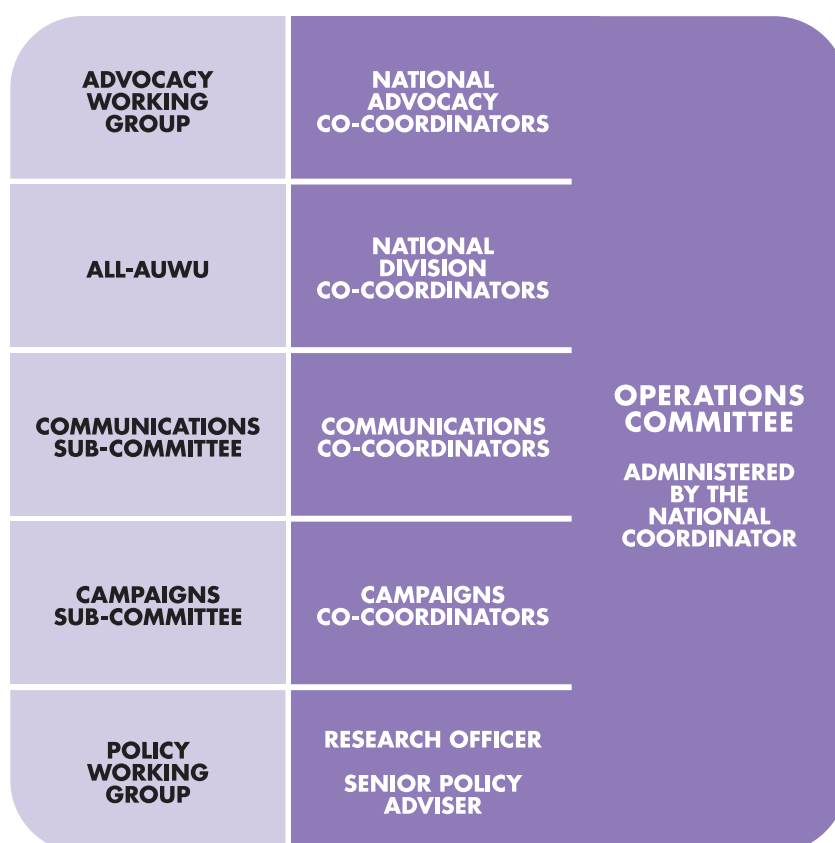
Jessica Harrison
Campaigns
Co-Coordinator



Jeremy Poxon
Communications
Coordinator/Organiser

On behalf of the Operations Committee, we would like to extend our warm gratitude and thanks to the following comrades who served on the committee in 2019/2020 and who continue to play an important part in our movement:

- Sean Kenny (Previous Campaigns Coordinator).
- Simone Casey (Previous Senior Policy Adviser).
- Gene Saraçi (Previous Online Advocacy Coordinator - role subsumed into Advocacy Working Group).
- James Craig (Previous Social Media Coordinator - role merged into Communications Co-Coordinator positions).



Note on the report:

It is vital to remember that this report *only* highlights the activities of the Operations Committee and its volunteers. The amazing work by our local branches and state divisions, is *not included* in this Operations report. The Operations Committee acknowledges and celebrates the work done by our local branches this year and wants to remind members to join their local branch to get active in our movement.

Following the precedent set by last year's AGM report, the Operations Committee agreed to send in a collective report on the OC's activities in 2020.

We have only included in this report activities and actions that are relevant to our roles and responsibilities, and have not included all other work that does not pertain to these roles.

The Operations Committee sends our deepest sympathies to all members and volunteers' families that have been affected either by covid and/or the deepening recession.

Summary of 2020

In the years of the Spanish flu, the trade union movement did not recede and cower to capital, but grew. Sydney wharfies and Perth lumpers struck, transport workers organised, and the trade union movement began to recover from the herculean 1917 general strike. In the year of Covid, the trade union movement is echoing that rich past and we've seen more strikes in 2020 than in several years. The working class movement is growing, and so too is the AUWU.

With hundreds of thousands swelling the ranks of the reserve army of labour this year, this could have been a year of division. A revival of the age-old concept of the "deserving/undeserving" poor, that has been used to divide us and cast us off from the working class as "the poor Other". But the union stood to the challenge. Not only did we manage to grow, but we forged a better connection with the broader trade union movement and successfully advocated for all the unemployed. An exemplar of this, was our joint-advocacy sessions we ran with the United Workers Union, a concrete example of how employed and unemployed workers interests are one.¹

Key Stats:

**14 Local Branches,
5 State Divisions,
ALL-AUWU created**

**3 Major Campaigns:
Keep The Rate, MO
Strike, Know Your
Rights**

**4 Full advocacy
training sessions**

**334 hotline cases
successfully handled.**

**480 email advocacy
cases successfully
completed**

**100 voice emails
successfully followed up**

**Weekly average of 3-5
advocacy requests via
social media**

**3 major Senate
inquiries and
submissions**

**Launched AUWU
Redbubble account**

**Launched AUWU
MOBot**

**New AUWU website
launching early 2021**

**25,183 Facebook
followers**

**11,487 Twitter
followers**

**80 officials this year,
an increase of 20
officials.**

¹ See Advocacy Working Group report and the Communications Sub-Committee report.



Like everything this year, Covid threw the social security system and employed services system into a whirlwind. Operations, from the beginning of the crisis and to now, has been at the forefront of ensuring our advocacy services remain 100% free, professional, up-to-date, and be there to support our members in need.² With the onset of recession, the Coalition government (with Labor's pressure, esp. re: JobKeeper and JobSeeker) created a series of policies that drastically changed our members lives for a short time. JobSeeker, JobKeeper, the \$750 stimulus, and the covid supplement, created new material conditions for the union to organise in. The first of which, the \$750 stimulus payment, led our communications team to encourage unemployed workers to share their stories as to what the \$750 would mean to them. Under the hashtag #My750, the stories went viral³ and raised the consciousness of the contradictions of what this one-off payment meant. Despite being a founding member of the Raise the Rate campaign, the union was surprised that it'd be a coalition government that would effectively double the rate with the covid supplement early this year. These were halcyon days of a sort, and our campaigns sub-committee quickly mobilised to start the KeepTheRate⁴ campaign and galvanise public, community, and institutional support for the supplement rate to become the new rate. We built connections in the trade union movement, both through encouraging rank-and-file trade union members taking our draft motions of the KeepTheRate to pass through their local branch and by working with senior officials to support our campaign (esp. CPSU, UUU). As well as lobbying local councils, building community support, non-profits, politicians, and other key stakeholders, we built our coalition. Where it was appropriate, our local branches organised in the streets as well. The coalition government, however, had of course only ever raised the rate in a cynical, calculated maneuver to avoid social disruption with the numerous newfound "deserving unemployed"; but we moved quickly to build the connections among the whole working class to fight back against any attempt at disunity. While the supplement was sharply cut (see the AUWU's campaign #NotALifeLine), the campaign was still successful in that we avoided the very real potential horror of having a two-payment system.

The employment services industry - that modern day Workhouse, half Dickensian half Kafkaesque - quickly moved to take the new masses of unemployed into their offices, to get that sweet "servicing fee" and set the ball in motion for profit. Economist

2 See Advocacy Working Group report.

3 Trended number 2 on Twitter and several articles were written that featured the campaign.

4 The union also made it clear in its campaign that other social security payments, e.g. the Disability Support Pension, Single Parenting Payment, etc., need to be permanently raised as well.



Alison Pennington once called job agencies “hamster wheels for the poor”, but what this characterisation misses is that there’s a billion dollar industry here that intersects with other value-producing sectors. It’s not just about punishing and disciplining us, it’s also about money and engendering desperation to try and create a scab labour force out of us.

The Department, Centrelink, and the employment service industry monumentally failed the unemployed during Covid, especially when it came to mutual obligations information. Basic questions about mutual obligations were nowhere to be found. Unemployed workers didn’t know if they had to risk contracting covid to go to their Work-For-the-Dole site or mutual obligation activity or not. The AUWU’s advocacy and policy team immediately went into action and tirelessly pulled all our strings with the Department and pressured them to provide us with information and produce better guidelines for unemployed workers. We continually updated our members online and through our branches about this evolving situation, and soon produced a series of updated mutual obligation rights guide information for unemployed workers. From the beginning, however, the union was there for all the unemployed. Our online advocacy team produced materials for newly unemployed workers (many of whom had never been on social security before) with information on how to get a Customer Reference Number, how to navigate the Centrelink system, and how to ensure their rights were protected.

In 2020 our advocacy services were in higher demand than ever. Overall, we processed about a 1,000 advocacy requests through our hotline, email, and online advocacy services. All of this achieved, while being a 100% free service, fully staffed by dedicated volunteers, and operating on multiple platforms 5 days a week. It’s a remarkable ongoing achievement. It’s the heart of the union and always will be.

Despite an unprecedented pandemic, the employment services industry did not back down, with our members sharing their horror stories in the media. We responded with our innovative Mutual Obligations Strike. Short, daring, and successful. The strike met all of its goals and empowered our members to assert their rights despite the movement restrictions, rather than our more traditional passive advocacy strategy.⁵

5 See the Communications Sub-Committee report.



Artist: Nicky Minus
nicky--minus.tumblr.com

Throughout the year, the AUWU responded to 3 major government inquiries/standing committees and produced submissions for unemployed workers by unemployed workers.⁶ Our Communications Co-Coordinator and Policy Adviser, did the union proud attending these committees and presenting evidence.

The union's recognition as the voice for the unemployed workers has only grown this year. The union was virtually in the news every week and/or invited for media comment, speaking engagements and events. Additionally, Mehreen Faruqi quoted our submissions in the senate and officially acknowledged the union's work in the senate - no small feat for a relatively young ratbag organisation like ours!

We've built internally too. 2020 saw the old national division working group (the old peak body for branches as a sub-body of Operations) was dissolved into the new ALL-AUWU. It now stands as the union's highest decision making, and in which local branches have *direct* representation.⁷ Additionally, Operations moved further to empower its sub-groups to carry out its activities in a more decentralised and democratic fashion, exemplified by the new Communications Sub-Committee and Campaigns Sub-Committee. In mid 2020, the National Operations Coordinator wrote a major proposal for the formation of a Structural Reform Committee (SRC) to help write a new constitution and national structure for the union. Throughout 2020, the union has continued to evolve and grow from its nuclei non-for-profit structure in 2014 into a dynamic and exciting new form of organisation fit for its material conditions. Issues still remain though.⁸ And despite this achievement, local branch growth - overall - remained stagnant this year,⁹ and there is no doubt online meetings (especially during lockdown) contributed strongly to this burnout. As a significant number of our members don't have regular access to the internet or the assets to do so, an unfortunate side-effect was that there were members this year who couldn't participate in their union. Next year, however, looks promising and a return to local branch meetings in person is to

6 See: AUWU's Submission to the *Economic Recovery Package (JobMaker Hiring Credit) Amendment Bill 2020 (no.15)*, AUWU's Submission to the *Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Continuation of Cashless Welfare) Bill 2020 (no. 34)*, and AUWU's Submission to the *Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Extension of Coronavirus Support) Bill 202 (no. 31)*.

8 See: ALL-AUWU report.

9 Except for notable gains in QLD and TAS. See ALL-AUWU report and National Operations Coordinator report.



auwu.redbubble.com

be expected. What was said of the 1930's Unemployed Workers Movement is true of the AUWU local branches, in that:

"The U.W.M was very good at mobilising anger and raising morale. It provided a complete alternative life for the unemployed: there was comradeship, entertainment and, above all, action. The U.W.M had the guts to do something for you."¹⁰

Like all unions, we needed to get some merch together for our volunteers, members, and supporters to represent the union in their local community. This year, we launched our AUWU redbubble account with our new fantastic designs by our Lead Designer and members. There was also some great art created this year. Nicky Minus' work, in particular, deserves special mention.

Carrying over in 2021, the Operations Committee will see the conclusion of some exciting projects launched this year. In 2021, our new website - developed with CommonCode - will be launched as well as the union will transition from ActionNetwork to its own Customer Relations Management (CRM) suite, that will empower our volunteers to better activate existing members and reach new ones as well.¹¹

Due to our significant fundraising efforts and our supporters, the union also has good financial standing to conduct larger projects in 2021 and ensure our branches are supported.

To achieve all of this, the Operations Committee met 24 times this year and it's volunteers have dedicated an giantianic amount of their time to our movement. This doesn't even include the

¹⁰ Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: Portrait of an Australian Working-Class Community 1900-1965*.

¹¹ See: Communications Sub-Committee report.

countless other meetings, preparation or follow-up work, public appearances, or day-to-day responsibilities the Operations team carried out this year. A result of this was the decision to move to a co-coordinator role sharing structure for future Operations.

After such a year, it's fitting that we conclude our summary with a continuity quote from one of our members in our 2019 Raise the Rate video:

“[Unemployment is] not a marginal problem... everyone who's a worker is haunted by the possibility of losing their work. Unemployment is a problem for every worker, even if they're in work”.

While that message may sometimes only be seen through a glass, darkly, it has been a real measurement of the union's progress from 2014 to 2020 to build that message in totality, in class and community.

In Solidarity,

Alex North

National Operations Coordinator.

National Operations Coordinator Report

As the National Operations Coordinator, I was responsible for managing the Operations Committee, organising planning, and ensuring the smooth running of the national structure.

2020 was a challenging year that interrupted a lot of our strategic planning and plans from 2019. However, we took it on the chin and responded to the new conditions with remarkable ingenuity, especially with our empowering Mutual Obligations strike and rapid response Keep the Rate Campaign.

My central role was not to micromanage the highly competent members of the committee. But to support, mentor, and - in short - empower them to grow in their roles and collaborate with all the organs of the union.

As all of the Operations members are located in different states/territories, it was my role to create a decentralized working environment in which our volunteers can communicate, plan, strategize, and work together on projects, as well as mundane activities.

It was my responsibility to organise, chair, and ensure good record keeping of all 24 Operations meetings that happened in 2020. Improving internal communications and processes from last year, the team agreed - at the suggestion of Kristin - to shift from slack/email/asana to Ryver. Ryver proved a useful platform for union and changed the way we actioned items from the old system developed last year. This made it easier to track outcomes, planning, and measure volunteering capacity. We are looking to roll it out to the state divisions, and the branches, in 2021 with extensive training.

Key Projects and Outcomes:

- **Building the Operational Structure of the union.** As outlined in my 2019 report to the AGM, the Operations Committee is still a relatively new structure in the union and it's been a key responsibility of mine to develop it. This year, I drafted a Communications Sub-Committee proposal with Jeremy Poxon (then Communications Coordinator) to create a new sub-body in the union, with a list of new positions and responsibilities, to decentralise Operations and encourage more autonomy. Now led by Kristin O'Connell and Jez Heywood, the Sub-Committee has successfully managed the communications of the union and generated exciting new strategies and campaigns. With the success of the Communications Sub-Committee, I then worked with Sean Kenny (then Campaigns Coordinator) to do the same with the old Campaigns Working Group. Additionally, I produced several much-needed procedural and policy documents that were needed for the (future) committee's work - chief among this, was the Operations Committee Definitions document. In 2021, groundwork has already been laid to do the same with the

Note: As I have decided not to put my hand up for a third term as National Operations Coordinator, at the urging of my comrades, I have written a terse letter thanking everyone for their support in my time in the role and outlining some of my achievements in the past two years in the role (see: appendix 1).

Throughout this report, it is paramount that you keep in mind that all of the work I have done as National Coordinator could not have been done without the support, friendship, and dedication of all of the comrades who have so generously given their time to the unemployed workers' movement. I would especially like to acknowledge my fellow members of the Committee of Management, the branches, and of course my fantastic comrades in the Operations Committee.



other two working groups (advocacy and policy/research), and to also invest more time and resources to assisting the ALL-AUWU with their sub-groups.

- **Building the ALL-AUWU:** At the end of 2019, the National Division Working Group was in a worse state than first estimated when the previous National Branch Coordinator exited their role. I spent a substantial section of the first half of 2020, restarting and rebuilding national relations with local branches and creating a new body - the ALL-AUWU - that would surpass the previous NDWG. The ALL-AUWU, unlike the NDWG, actually gives the local branches direct representation to the highest decision making body in the union, and will be key in 2021 in strengthening national/state/local relationships.
- **Structural Reform Committee:** Early mid-year I wrote a major 30 page proposal for the formation of a new body of the union - the Structural Reform Committee - to be charged with reviewing and critically assessing the current structure of the AUWU and begin the groundwork for a new draft constitution. As outlined in the internal proposal, I believe that the time has come for the union to build a solid new structure atop fresh foundations, as there are significant contradictions with the original 2014 structure.¹² As co-chair, the SRC is currently meeting regularly and is meeting its timeline goals.
- **Supporting and training new officials:** Throughout the year, I personally trained and mentored about 20 officials (including the new Operations coordinators) to assist their development into their new roles.

¹² See: Structural Reform Committee proposal and documents. For members not involved, please contact src@auwu.org.au for more information.

- **Representing the AUWU:** Represented the AUWU at several meetings this year with key stakeholders and unions, building our connections and interests: Australian Council of Social Service, United Workers, UnionsNSW, Community and Public Sector Union, Public Service Association, GetUp!, Australian Greens, Victorian Socialists, Retail and Fast Food Workers Union, and Australian Progress.
- **2020 substantial update and redraft of the National Structure documents.** As there were significant structural changes this year, I decided to rewrite the entire national structure documents and condense them into an accessible 60 page document.
- **Collaborating and participating in AUWU bodies:** Working with the Committee of Management every month and steering committee meetings every fortnight, attending ALL-AUWU meetings, advocacy working group meetings, assisting coordinators create snap-working groups to respond to urgent issues, and supporting the development of the QLD Division (particular credit is due to comrade Callen Sorensen Karklis, as the QLD Division Coordinator). I would like to also acknowledge the amazing work done by Will Boon (Former TAS Division Coordinator) and Marina Chapman (TAS Division Secretary) in revamping the TAS Division this year.

Areas for improvement:

The Operations committee faced some significant challenges this year due to (1) committee member turnover early in the year and (2) a lack of an annual plan for 2020. Operations roles are technical and require people to have the right skill set, enough free time, good interpersonal skills, and the willingness to volunteer often full-time hours for the movement. I advertised for a couple of the positions and worked with the branches to see if there were people who fit the criteria - by early-mid year, those roles were filled. Having to spend extra time training up new officials, took me away from some of the long term planning and projects I had planned in early 2020. Multiplied by covid and the cancelling of our annual planning day, 2020 only saw the Operations committee work on short-medium length plans (rather than an annual one). Despite the success of the committee this year, this was the greatest setback.

Since the role's creation in 2019, the National Operations Coordinator has been a full-time job. The hours are long and often irregular, and I often found myself working 40+ hours a week as the norm (this applies to the other Operations Committee positions too). The workload is unsustainable for a volunteer and was the motivation for the introduction of co-coordinator positions for all Operations roles. This is currently working exceptionally well in the communications team and will be progressively rolled out throughout the operational structure of the union in 2021. Despite this, burnout remains a very serious issue and future Operations will need to monitor it closely.

Internal communications from Operations and its sub-groups to local branches was a bit lacking this year as well. Local branch coordinators reported that they had trouble with "email overload"

for notifications for meetings and that the union lacks a cohesive, centralised calendar system for events and regular meetings. Another major contributing factor to this issue was that the AUWU's g-suite had technical issues this year. However, we are moving into 2021 with the purchasing of our own g-suite which should resolve these issues. On top of this, several of our officials and key volunteers don't have regular access to the internet, and this compounded the ongoing issue this year of trying to organise during social distancing/lockdown measures.

Conclusion:

2020 marks a year of success and growth for the operational arm of the union. The structure evolved to allow greater branch participation in operational decision making, through the sub-bodies and ALL-AUWU, and is continuing to develop our participatory democracy. The Operations Committee, despite some setbacks, stands in a stronger position for 2021 under its new co-coordinator rule. All of us in Operations can be very proud to say the union is now in a much better place than when we first joined it.

Communications Sub-Committee Report

Written by Kristin O'Connell and Jez Heywood.

Jeremy Poxon is the incumbent Communications Coordinator, and took leave from May 2020. Kristin O'Connell and Jez Heywood have been Acting Communications Co-coordinators since May. Other volunteers include Tom Studans, Asher Wolf, Isabel Blanchard and Paul MacMillan. The Communications Co-ordinators organise the meetings of the Communications Sub-Committee - formed in February - which is delegated to manage the day-to-day running and functions of the union's communications.

Key projects and outcomes:

- Coordination of major campaign against mutual obligations including strategy, planning, materials, graphics, external and internal communications, stakeholder engagement, volunteer activation and management, media, social media
- Submissions on JobMaker hiring credit, Cashless Debit Card, COVID supplement extension, National Employment Services Trial licensing model
- Senate appearances for JobMaker hiring credit and COVID supplement inquiries
- Relationship development and collaboration with: GetUp!, Accountable Income Management Network, Renters and Housing Union (Vic), Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, People with Disability Australia, the Australian Greens, Retail and Fast Food Workers Union, Casualised Unemployed and Precarious Uni Workers, United Workers Union, Community and Public Sector Union, Anglicare, EveryAGE Counts/Benevolent Society, ATM Industry Association, Elise Klein, Green Institute, Disability Workers Union, Neurodiverse Workers Alliance, Victorian Socialists, Vixen Collective, Cooperative Power, National Council of Single Mothers & Their Children, National Tertiary Education Union
- Presented at forums and events hosted by GetUp, Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, United Workers Union, Casualised Unemployed and Precarious Uni Workers
- Launch of the AUWU merchandise store
- Establishment of new media distribution platform
- Production of the reporter's guide to unemployment myths
- Major interviews: RN Breakfast post-budget coverage, RN Breakfast employment services, three Saturday Paper articles including a front page, Scott Ludlam for his forthcoming book on emerging global political movements,
- Internal policy: Code of conduct, Anti Sexual Harassment and Assault
- Digital infrastructure: new website and membership database tool (CRM) – both in progress

- Training: Australian Progress Economic Media Centre
- Provided support and participated in projects of the Campaigns, Policy, All-Branch and Advocacy working groups and the Structural Reform Committee.



Mutual obligations strike:

On August 4, we called a Mutual Obligations strike opposing the reintroduction of 'mutual' obligations and directed people on JobSeeker and related payments to firmly refuse to engage with job agencies while no penalties are in place.

We prepared comprehensive information and resources to assist people in understanding their rights which were posted on the AUWU media substack.

We were worried people would be too afraid to join the #MOstrike after experiencing years of abuse at the hands of job agencies and politicians' complete failure to protect us.

But unemployed workers defied the intimidating forces mobilising against us and refused to be quiet. In the first week of the Mutual Obligations Strike, 9,367 people accessed the "I Know My Rights" reference guide, 3,785 people signed the Suspend Mutual Obligations petition and over 160 people reported questionable Job Agency behaviour.

Minister Cash responded, telling news.com.au she considered the strike:

"bizarre in both practical and theoretical terms. The AUWU is calling for job seekers who are offered jobs to remain on income support, face financial penalties and deny themselves the opportunity of employment and income. In a time of recession you would think that AUWU would be helping Australians find work, rather than finding ways to avoid it."

We responded in the same piece, calling Mutual Obligations "pointless and punitive" and adding:

"The Minister has confirmed to us no one can be penalised for not doing things now, but people are so afraid of these providers they don't trust us or the Minister, it's a devastating system that crushes people. Mutual obligations force people to do activities that don't help them, taking up time and energy, and it makes it impossible to get into work. They achieve nothing and punish people for not being in a job: It's not people's fault, there aren't enough jobs for people to have one."

"The AUWU has always and continues to support and encourage its members to look for meaningful work and we are grateful that for the first time they have been able to do so on their own terms. It would benefit everyone except the job agencies we are protesting against if this became permanent. No one wants to be on a poverty payment, our members have continued applying for work throughout the

Stories from the MOStrike

"How'd #MOstrike make me feel? Whatever's the opposite of paralysing anxiety in combination with recurrent suicidal ideation. Whatever that feeling is it'd be that."

"Free. Free from the stress and depression caused by mutual obligations. Free from the dirty rotten lies and manipulation from dodgy 'job providers'."

"My 'job provider' thinks that making me apply for a job that closed 2 weeks ago and that I am not qualified for, is good for my job search and dignity."

"Thank you for making me feel not alone."

"It was period of solace and peace without being disturbed and threatened."

So, so impressed by the #MOstrike. Just emailed my job service provider letting them know that I know my rights and I won't be working on a job plan with them (esp while I'm working full time on a PhD!). I've never been more thrilled to click send.

Proud to join the the strike against 'mutual' obligations (they're not mutual) & 'job providers' (who don't really provide jobs). only thing i've experienced dealing w providers is: incompetence, disrespect, condescension, harassment.

"I had a phone call from my JSP and she got told that I'm on strike and will not be participating, so goodbye. Felt good."

APM insists on making phone appts but never manages to call on time. Today's appt was for 2:30. Someone called at 12.50 but I ignored it because I didn't recognise the number. 2:30 came and went, no call. It's just rude. This is why we strike.



pandemic, they have just been doing it without the job agency boot on their neck.

Responding to Minister Cash's claim that the jobactive scheme had been a "success" since its introduction in 2015, we responded that there was "no evidence" for that claim:

"unless you measure success by the number of billions of public money transferred to poverty profiteers. We are concerned that the Minister believes 1.6 million people being placed into insecure work over five years is a success because there are currently 1.6 million people unemployed."

On 27 September, the day before the return of Mutual Obligations, we ended the strike against the harmful and oppressive (un) employment services system. In roughly six weeks, thousands of unwaged, underemployed and insecure workers stood up to job agency bullying and mistreatment. In total, 15,683 people viewed the "I Know My Rights" reference guide and we collated numerous stories from strikers and supporters.

Twitter: According to social media analytics site socialblade.com, the main AUWU Twitter account has already seen its number of followers double in 2020. At the start of the year, 5,635 people followed the account. By November, that number had increased to 11,487.

There were two noticeable spikes in twitter followers: the week of March 23-30, following the announcement of the JobSeeker Coronavirus Supplement, led to an increase of 664 followers; the week of August 17-24 - during the Mutual Obligations strike - saw the union gain 837 followers.

MOBOT: In July, as part of our Mutual Obligations strike, we launched @AUWU_MOBOT, an automated twitter account that tweets a range of information about current Mutual Obligations requirements across the day.

Since its launch, Twitter analytics shows the account has acquired over 600 followers and its tweets have gathered over 670,000 impressions.⁴ In August, during the Mutual Obligations strike, the account achieved its highest monthly total of 235,000 impressions (an average of 7,600 per day), 209 link clicks, 189 retweets and 537 likes.

Stories from the MOStrike

"The reason I hate mutual obligations isn't because they are pointless, mundane bureaucratic work-like activities (I love those!) it's that I have a much more intricate kafka maze path and I don't appreciate the misdirection."

"Making vulnerable people dance in the town square while onlookers jeer and throw coins would be more dignified and respectful than making them deal with centrelink and so called 'job service providers'."

Just politely told my JSA to pound sand, and while it was kinda nerve racking...I'm well within my rights, I've got the current law on my side, and union backup if they try to get grumpy about it. No one should be scared to want to be treated like a person.

On behalf of my housemate who is unemployed, and has had a horrific experience over the last 2 years with JSP's. He has felt relieved, and focusing more on job applications within his field (pharmaceutical science) without stress when there is a period without new job listings.

I've been able to focus on uni. My mental health has improved because I haven't been terrified of getting in trouble because I'm finding it hard to find jobs to apply for. I even worked on a novel I'd had writer's block on for two years. In short: IT WAS AWESOME.

"This is bold, necessary and carefully thought through."

Mutual obligations destroy mental health, punish people who don't deserve it, and are ineffective!! the #MOstrike is a brave and necessary step — mutual obligations must go!!

#MOstrike has the potential to be one of the most important collective actions in recent years. With most unions neutered by red tape #MOstrike is a reminder of class solidarity. The left need to recognise this moment and get on board.





Design

In June, we launched the Jobs Report graphics across social media. Combining the government's monthly jobseeker recipient data with the results from a seek.com.au search of jobs listed in the previous 30 days, we were able to show clearly how few jobs there are for jobseekers.

Other regular social media graphics series included: multiple calls to action to get people to contact their MPs regarding the coronavirus supplement and cashless welfare; a "Know Your Rights" campaign centred on phase three of reintroduction of mutual obligations; "What They're Worth" calculated how many years of JobSeeker could be paid for using the income and wealth of certain individuals like Sarina Russo, Angus Taylor and Rupert Murdoch; similarly "What It's Worth" calculated how many years JobSeeker could be raised above the poverty line instead of certain items of government expenditure like fighter jets, submarines and subsidies for fossil fuel companies; "Pizza The Action" showed social security payments as a percentage of the average wage through pizza slice pie charts.



MCLF: In April, we launched the AUWU Milk Crate Liberation Front (MCLF), our merchandising site on online retailer Redbubble. In keeping with our membership structure, we set two price points for merch sales - regular, which has a minimal profit, and solidarity, which is set at a higher rate for those who can afford to pay more to support the Union.

From April to November, we sold 620 items. The bulk of our merchandise shipped to Australia, but we also had buyers in Canada, Hong Kong, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the USA.

Conclusion

The Communications Sub-Committee has had a massive impact this year. As with everything, there is always room for improvement. Internal communications is one area that has been identified as needing work.

There is scope for improvements to the design process as well. A styleguide is something that is well overdue, however capacity to produce one has been limited by the amount of other work going on. Capacity could be increased in one of two ways: by identifying suitably-experienced and skilled volunteers who could assist with design work, or by finding other people to join the comms team to free up time for the lead designer.



Wonthaggi Branch Poverty Day action.

Campaigns Sub-Committee Report

Written by Jessica Harrison as Campaigns Co-Coordinator

The Campaigns Sub-Committee is responsible for organising the union's campaigns efforts and coordinating its role out through the national branch structure. The Campaigns Sub-Committee replaced the Campaigns Working Group from 2019, and as a Sub-Committee of Operations, is empowered to greater decision making and the ability to create new positions. The Sub-Committee meets every 2-3 weeks and has had good attendance, with only the absence of Adelaide and Perth (due to technical difficulties and lack of access to internet during covid).

Sean Kenny and I began sharing the Sean Kenny and I began sharing the Campaigns Coordination role in June 2020, after Sean had indicated he wanted to step down in September. I remained acting Campaigns Coordinator until I officially took on the role in November 2020. My original impetus was to organise coordinated action to resist the removal of the COVID supplement and a return to the bad old days of the old Newstart rate. Since taking on the role, I have found the whole process of coordinating our campaigns activities and organising the meetings of the Campaigns Sub-Committee for maximum impact, very rewarding. I look forward to better coordination and active campaigning in 2021.

Key projects and outcomes:

- **AUWU week of action:** August 24-28 was the AUWU week of action to keep Jobseeker at the increased COVID supplement rate. Media release from our media team was available for Branches to use. Canberra, Wollongong, Hobart, Sydney and many other branches took action that week.



Wollongong

- **Building the future of the Raise the Rate campaign:** I attend ACOSS Raise the Rate meetings, so was able to coordinate 2 digital actions on 26th August Google map reviews at Josh Frydenberg's office with Melbourne AUWU Branch and a digital "check in" at Scott Morrison's office which was boosted by Raise the Rate. Sean attended Living Incomes for Everyone (LIFE) meetings and spoke at their digital launch. Good alliances were built with the Tomorrow Movement, LIFE, Wollongong Undergraduate Student Association. We then moved into process of organising for #Povertyday actions leading up to Sept 24th, when the rate was reduced. A fiery AUWU media release was put to good use by local Branches for Poverty Day.
- **KeepTheRate:** after the announcements re: the covid supplement, the union moved quickly to form alliances within the coalition of the RTR campaign - as well outside it - to move beyond the original rate and raise the ask for the rate to be kept. The union had always pushed for all payments to be raised above the poverty line, but it was crucial that the union lead in the RTR coalition and build trade union support for the rate to be permanently raised above the poverty line. Through a series of meetings, events, policy documents, and lobbying, the union successfully pushed key supporters -esp. GetUp!, sections of the trade union movement, and the Greens - to shift their original policy platform in line with our members interests.

Areas for improvement:

This year, the union had to be quite reactive due to the sudden and rapid changes brought upon by covid. A lot of the plans made in early 2020 had to be postponed, and several branches felt discouraged having their campaigns activities postponed as well. Compared with 2019, there was obviously less on-the-ground activity from last year and participation was therefore low. We adapted by engaging in the online campaigns of the communications team, but in the end, this wasn't the core of what

we do/want to do as the campaigns sub-committee. Despite this, administratively and internally, the campaigns sub-committee represented growth for the structure of the union. In 2021 we should be better prepared to hit the ground running.

Conclusion

In the Sub-Committee we aim to start early with planning for 2021.

In December we are aiming to choose a core campaign to focus on for the first half of 2021 (e.g. “Abolish Job Agencies”, “Abolish Mutual Obligations”, or “No Payments BelowThe Poverty Line”). This core campaign will be a priority for the CSC. The CSC will coordinate local branch actions (e.g. rallies, events) as part of a broader campaign strategy. The CSC will propose a campaign focus and strategy before the end of the year (to be approved by the ALL-AUWU meeting).”

We now have a Calendar of CSC meetings. I am volunteering to add to the calendar links to our submissions when they are made public, as well as Branch meeting times and events run by kindred organisations.

At the moment, fortnightly ALL-AUWU and CSC meetings are in the same week. In 2021 it will be better to have them on alternate weeks.

The distribution of Starter Packs for branches and AUWU customised material is a priority for the CSC in 2021.

The CSC planning will be incorporated into the 2021 Annual Plan, to be drafted by the new Operations Committee in 2021.

Advocacy Working Group Report

Written by Tracey Smallwood as National Advocacy Coordinator and edited by Alex North as National Operations Coordinator.

The Advocacy Working Group is responsible for organisation and delivery of the AUWU advocacy services. As of December 2020, the AUWU Advocacy services consists of a free 5 day a week 1800 hotline, email advocacy, online advocacy via social media platforms (5 days a week), and in person advocacy on request. As well as regularly updated advocacy information through our Rights Guide (new guide to be released early 2021 due to significant changes), updates through substack, and our website.

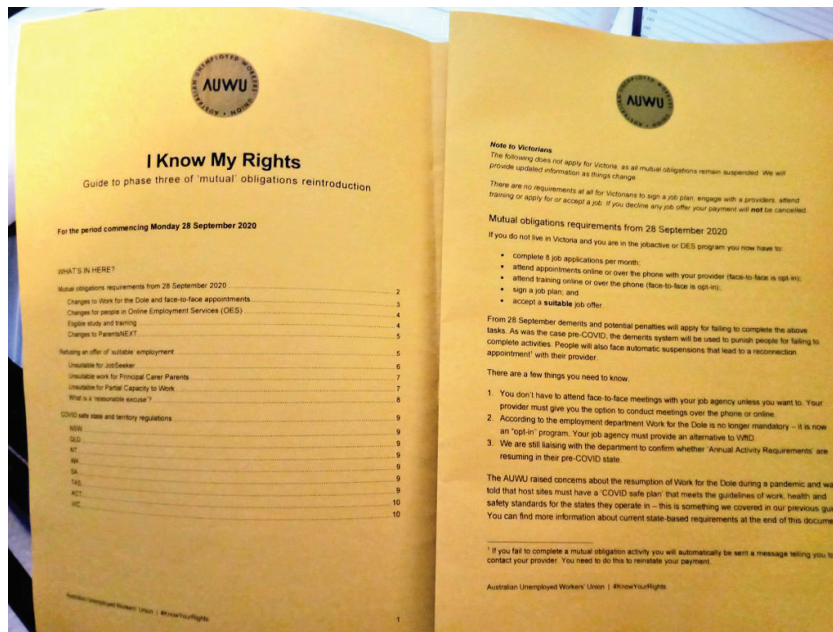
All advocacy services of the union are run entirely by volunteers. The union would like to acknowledge specifically the dedication, commitment, and fantastic advocacy work by Racheal, who - after years of service - has taken a step back from advocacy. We would also like to thank Erin for the time she spent as an advocate with our advocacy family.

Key projects and outcomes:

- **4 National Advocacy Training sessions completed in 2020.** 3 online and 1 in Geraldton WA and Perth. Over 100 people received advocacy training from the union this year.
- **Advocacy Stats:**
 - 334 total advocacy hotline cases successfully handled.
 - 234 Active Calls
 - 100 Voice Emails⁷
 - 480 email cases successfully handled.
 - Weekly average of 3-5 online advocacy requests via social media platforms⁸.
- **Ensuring up-to-date advocacy re: Mutual Obligations changes this year:** Working with the Senior Policy Adviser, the union ensured that from the beginning of the crisis, our members had correct state-by-state advocacy information. These updates were posted on the union's sub-stack account. Unfortunately, physical copies and distribution via handouts/information stands were not possible due to covid restrictions.
- **Reaching out to first time unemployed workers:** Our then online advocacy coordinator, Gene Saraci, published information via our social media accounts (as well as publishing an article with Pilot) re: a guide to dealing with Centrelink for first time workers accessing social security. Reaching out to new unemployed workers - many of whom have never been unemployed for significant periods of time before - will be increasingly important for the union going forward.
- **Building trade union connections:** the AUWU received calls from Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union, Australian Workers Union, United Workers Union,

7 A voice email occurs if either: (a) the hotline is already engaged when a call comes through (on busy days, the union normally organises 2-3 advocates to work the hotline), or, (b) the call has come through outside the operating hours of the hotline. The email goes to a specific inbox, which is then followed up by the advocate within a reasonable timeframe.

8 Online advocacy services are offered via facebook and twitter, and are coordinated by the Online Advocacy Coordinator (now subsumed into the Advocacy Working Group).



The AUWU's "I Know My Rights" guide to assist members with the reintroduction of Mutual Obligations

Retail and Fast Food Workers Union, and other trade union members who reached out to receive our help with Centrelink and the employment services industry. Additionally, the union cooperated with UWU to deliver advocacy training services to their officials and members as well - a significant first for the union and great step forward for our movement.

Room for improvement:

Advocacy is the most rewarding part of the union, but it is also the most draining and difficult part. Not everyone is cut out for advocacy, especially when our advocates are still in the system and know firsthand the callers experience. Some challenges the advocacy team faces this year were the following: transitioning advocates from training to service delivery, moving new advocates from email delivery from advocacy line delivery, difficulty having multiple advocates work the line on the same day (friday in particular), and supporting our advocates when they transition into employment. Next year, a key focus of advocacy will be the redevelopment of our advocacy training and the creation of two-stream advocacy training: revamping the more general, "know your rights sessions", and a more narrow and volunteer-oriented training sessions. Additionally, next year the advocacy coordinator role will also be moving to a co-coordinator position.

Conclusion:

2020 was another successful year for advocacy. Our team successfully managed the crisis and rapid changes to mutual obligations requirements. Through our hotline, email, and online advocacy cases, the union processed about 1,000 advocacy requests and was steadfast in ensuring unemployed workers - especially new unemployed workers - their new rights. Going into 2021, it will be the job of all bodies of the union - especially the local branches - to assert these rights.

Policy & Research Working Group Report

The Policy Adviser provides advice and assistance to the Operations Committee (and Committee of Management as necessary) on policy, strategy, legislation, and research relevant to the union.

I commenced in this role in May 2020. Over this six-month period I have fulfilled the requirements of the role by:

- Attended departmental reference group meetings on the changes to mutual obligations during COVID, and to updates within the development of the New Employment Services Model
- Met with stakeholders from non-governmental organisations, political parties, department and government to inform policy decision making for the AUWU
- Submitted reports to senate committee groups on the cashless debit card and continuation of the COVID supplement beyond 31 December
- Appeared at the JobMaker and COVID supplement extension public hearings
- Wrote an article for Jacobin that discussed the need to reimagine the employment and social security systems
- Worked with media and advocacy groups to advise on government policy, information

Areas for improvement:

This year, in particular, has been a busy year. I may not have been here before May 2020, but the amount of work that I have had to complete and prepare for, whilst researching and familiarising myself with guidelines/deeds etc. has made it hard to complete non-important work.

This is one particular area for improvement, which is going to be resolved by role sharing, the establishment of an ongoing working group and specialty working groups that will be organised temporarily for specific research topics used to decide policy decisions or projects.

With this in mind, 2021 will be used to establish said working groups to be able to divide up the workload, and also sharing the role will ensure that immediate work (like senate submissions announced a week before submission dates) can be completed effectively, whilst other work does not go abandoned.

Another proposal for the ongoing policy working group would be to work closely with the advocacy team to ensure that communicating correct and up to date information is done effectively. The first project would be to develop in collaboration with advocacy, communications and policy is a series of training modules and information packs that can be used for internal training, but also by campaigns to raise a collective awareness of rights.



Conclusion:

As changes to mutual obligations have largely returned to their pre-COVID state this will make it easier for any type of medium to long-term planning to go ahead without too much interruption. It will also be made easier with the organisation of a team to assist with any potential hiccups along the way.

All-AUWU Branch Report

Written by Bailey McCracken as *interim* National Division Secretary and Wyndham Morland as *interim* National Division Coordinator.

The All-AUWU is in charge of coordinating the branches of the union and ensuring that members can democratically have a say in the direction of the union. Led by the National Division Secretary and National Division Coordinator, the All-AUWU represents every branch of the union and their members.

The All-AUWU was formed this year, replacing the old National Division Working Group, and saw new opportunities for local branches to have their voices heard nationally in the union. The All-AUWU brought together all the branches of the union and passed motions put forward by local branches, and most recently the All-AUWU audited the existing branches. A particular highlight was the formation of the Strategy Working Group, which provided a much needed space for branches to learn from one another and will be continuing exciting work in 2021.

Key projects and outcomes:

- **National Branch Structure:**
- 14 Active local branches:
- NSW: Sydney, Wollongong
- SA: Adelaide (*Whyalla dissolved for the time being*)
- VIC: Melb, Wonthaggi, and Frankston.
- TAS: Hobart
- WA: Perth & Geraldton
- QLD: North-Central, Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast, and Bayside/ Brisbane.
- ACT: Canberra
- 5 Active State Divisions
- QLD Division, NSW Division, VIC Division, TAS Division, and ACT Division (*SA has temporarily paused activities, as the new State Division elections will be held in 2021*).
- **Branch Review:** With the interim appointments of the National Division Secretary and Coordinator, the first major project was to undertake an internal review of our current branches and review the strengths/weaknesses of it. The report proved to be quite extensive, and will be presented in 2021.
- **ALL-AUWU brings local branch motions to national attention:** Previously in the National Division Working Group structure, there was little opportunity for local members to raise motions through their local branch and to move them up to national consideration. The new structure has made substantial progress in addressing that issue, and now local branch motions (passed by a majority) form the agenda of ALL-AUWU meetings which include direct delegate representation from the local branches themselves. This marks a major improvement in the union's democracy, but it is only an improvement and not an end point.

- **Strategy Working Group:** the strategy working group was formed by a majority motion by the Melbourne branch to explore the union's strategic possibilities and implement them. The group has been meeting regularly and - once restrictions ease - will be trialing their new tactics out in 2021. Strategic thinking on the material conditions unemployed workers face and how we can resist and fight back, deserved its own body in the union; and it's appropriate that it came from the local branches itself, to serve the local branches.
- **Dedicated representatives to Operations:** Having the National Division Coordinator and Secretary serve in Operations, is an important step forward for the union in ensuring that even the technical aspects of the union retain local branch oversight. Additionally, have two permanent positions to serve the branches in a co-coordinator fashion, ensuring that the branches can be better assisted in the future.

Areas for improvement:

The All-AUWU was set up earlier this year and although it was appreciated by the membership, much work is still needed to develop this body into an effective representation of AUWU members (and not just local branch officials). During the branch review many issues were revealed, namely many branches are still lacking good communication lines with all of the different arms of the union. In particular, Operations Coordinators and sub-bodies are often very busy and need to either delegate better or organise regular meetings/internal communications to ensure that each local branch gets the support they need to serve their local membership. Additionally, this year marked stagnation in terms of growth of local branches. Despite the significant gains and revamping of the QLD Division and the TAS Division, we lost 2 South Australian branches and many branches felt discouraged by the turn to online meetings due to lockdown/social distancing measures.

Ultimately, the union must be more than an advocacy, communications/media, research/policy, and campaigns organisation for the unemployed. It must invest in its rank and file members, empower them, and ensure ongoing and crucial support for grass root branches. If this union is to achieve its goals for all of the unemployed, then there is no other option but to build a mass movement at the local level and that is something only local branches can achieve. Branches need more resources to organise workplace representatives, strikes, strike funds, unionisation drives etc. In reality this means all branches having bank accounts and having a steady flow of funds to manage their resources, provide supplementary income to activists/representatives for their work. This also means new branches and new office holders have access to the training and support they need in order to competently and effectively run their branches.

Real change comes from below and this is true of unions too. Unemployed workers refusing to work-for-the-dole site are going to send a chill down the spine of the JSP's and send the strongest message we can say as a union.

Conclusion:

2020 was the hardest year on record for the AUWU branches. Social distancing and lockdown, meant that the local branches had to meet online and the physical meeting spaces disappeared for most of the year. This was particularly hard for our local branches that aren't as tech savvy, and have only ever organised in person, through word of mouth, and through flyers/outreach work. Our National Branch structure is also a social space for our members, and losing the ability to have a community barbecue after celebrating a local win, takes a lot of colour and morale away from our movement. The trend towards online meetings is unusual for the union and has no doubt been alienating for many of our members. This is probably the major reason for branch stagnation this year, despite QLD growth. Despite these issues many members have stepped up in an organising capacity and look forward to the new year, we have recognised the issues and work towards resolving them.

Appendix

A1 National Coordinator's letter

(Note: This is a copy of an internally circulated letter, drafted on the 11th of November 2020 and circulated shortly afterwards.)

Dear comrades,

I'm writing this short statement to inform you all that after thoughtful consideration, I have decided not to put myself forward for a 3rd term as National Operations Coordinator.

At the suggestion of some of my comrades, they've encouraged me to write this short statement to outline some of my achievements and to encourage people to nominate themselves for the role in the future.

I'll be staying on in 2021 as a mentor assisting the new National Co-ordinators and the Committee of Management, but will be taking a step back from operations.

It feels a little embarrassing personally but it's important that we acknowledge all volunteers' contributions to the movement and follow the union's precedent.

As National Coordinator

Before 2019, there was no operations coordinator in the union. Operations were entirely carried out by the Committee of Management (CoM) and there were only a small handful of branches in the AUWU. As an ordinary member of CoM after the 2018 AGM (before that Adelaide Branch Coordinator and then SA coordinator), I worked with our committee to create the new "National Coordinator" position and delegate all operations responsibilities to it. As the first National Coordinator of our union, I saw my first responsibility was to create an operations team and delegate responsibilities to new coordinators to carry out a specific aspect of AUWU Operations (e.g. Online Advocacy, Campaigns, Policy, Social Media etc). Then build a team structure with sub-committees and working groups, to create a dynamic operational/technical structure of the union, to carry out an annual plan. You can read more about this and the first year of operations, in our report to the 2019 AGM.

Throughout 2020, the union grew despite covid hampering our on the ground organising abilities. The union now has several branches in every state and territory (except the NT). My focus in 2020, was to build up the national branch structure of the union that had been underemployed at this point of time.

Key to this, was the formation of a new highest decision making body for AUWU, where each local branch would be entitled to a delegate to vote directly on national decisions. This body - the All-AUWU - changed the structure of the union to give local branches direct representation and the ability for all branches to have participated in the various operational bodies of the union. More information will be available in the Operations Committee Report to Members at the 2020 AGM.

The union has historically existed as a hybrid between a non-for-

profit and a typical trade union. The tendency towards a rank-and-file union structure has grown progressively as the union has grown and developed. The AUWU needs a new structure. That's why I wrote the Structural Reform Committee Proposal document and created the SRC to draft an entire new constitution and structure for the union. For now, the update of our current national structure will be published before the AGM for members and for the SRC for the future.

Key achievements as National Coordinator:

- Created the operational structure of the AUWU: formed the first National Operations Committee, created its definitions and positions, and helped establish national sub-committees and working groups.
- Drafted and managed the first Annual Plan of the AUWU, overseeing the majority of the targets/goals accomplished before the deadline.
- Developed the AUWU structure and wrote the first AUWU National structure documents (including sub-committee documents etc.).
- Mentored and supported the exceptional operations committee members and coordinators, and created decentralised online working arrangements to manage team workflow and project coordination.
- Wrote and co-authored several AUWU senate submissions and represented the union at several senate inquiries, standing committees, and government bodies.
- Created the All-AUWU structure and developed the national branch structure, to allow for creating local branch representation and participation in the AUWU.
- Oversaw an increase in elected officials from under 15 people when I first took my role, to well over 80 elected officials now.

(Please note, that all of this would not have been possible without the incredible Operations Committees of 2019 and 2020, the branches, and the CoM. No individual is bigger than our union).

What the AUWU means to me, is that it's truly a movement of unemployed workers standing up for and representing themselves. It isn't some well-intentioned 'others' or non-profits speaking on our behalf. It's an organisation run by the unemployed for the unemployed. It's us, comrades, a class organising in itself for itself.

Before the AUWU, I was an out of work warehouse picker working casual hospo jobs to survive. Now, I'm still an underemployed worker working wherever I can to survive. But what has changed, is finding solidarity and comradeship in the most dynamic and exciting section of the working class movement. The movement has existed since the 1840's and is as old as the trade union movement in Australia. But our movement and the trade union movement are one and the same - the working class movement.

The 2019 operations committee report is available here and the 2020 report will be forthcoming with the AGM election. Alongside the updated National Structural document.

New National Operations Co-Coordinator Position

In 2021, the National Operation Coordinator position will be held by two people as co-coordinators. This is a fantastic role in the union and a great opportunity to help lead the AUWU into the future. I strongly encourage those interested to put their hand up to nominate for the position and to feel free to call me to talk over the role, if they have any questions. Here's a link to the form with all the relevant information. Nominations close on the 14th of December.

I will stay on as a mentor for the union and will be training and assisting the new national co-coordinators going forward.

I want to personally thank all my fellow comrades for their support, in particular the members of the Committee of Management of 2019 and 2020, the Operations Committee of 2019 and 2020, and of course the local branches and membership for supporting me.

Working as National Coordinator was more than a full time job, and the comrades that have supported me - especially when I was working 38+ a week in call-centre work plus the National Coordinator role - know who they are and I can't thank them enough. I'm proud of this movement and proud of the people in this movement.

If you want to contact me re: the role, my email is alex.north@auwu.org.au. In 2021, there will be 2 new National Co-Coordinator, so please redirect your email re: operations to operations@auwu.org.au

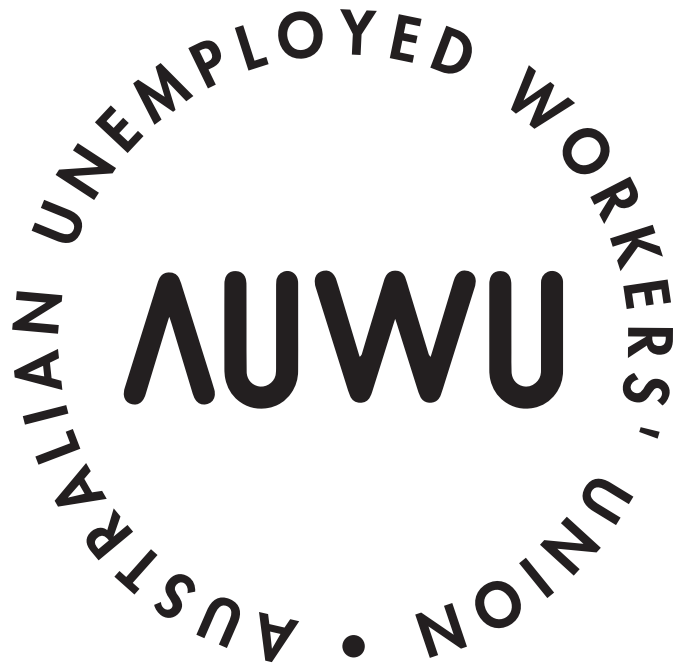
"Welfare history is rarely if ever written with a sense that the clients of the system have a part in the making of policy and administration. But in the 1930's, the history of unemployed relief and therefore the history of state provision for the unemployed cannot be written as a top down application of policy by either political parties, government, bureaucracies, or organisations like charities that presume to speak for clients. The clients themselves, the unemployed, demanded to be heard, and were...As individuals they were subject to the all-encompassing power of the relief system and its agents. As individuals they had lost control of their lives, they were supplicants. **Collectively they were participants in Depression politics. The difference is monumental.**"

Charlie Fox, 'Fighting Back: The Politics of the Unemployed in Victoria in the Great Depression'

In Solidarity,

Alex North.

11th of November, 2020.



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