Towards A New Classification System for Australian Unions

Richard Hall & Bill Harley

WORKING PAPER 46

Richard Hall is currently teaching in the Department of Government, The University of Queensland. Bill Harley is currently with the Department of Management at The University of Queensland. Both authors are members of the Labour and Industry Research Unit, The University of Queensland.
Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT)
Institute Building H03
University of Sydney    NSW    2006
Phone:   (02) 9351 5626
Fax:     (02) 9351 5615
Email: acirrt@sue.econ.su.oz.au

ACIRRT Working Paper No. 46
APRIL 1997
ISBN  1 86451 291 1
# CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS i

INTRODUCTION 1

PART ONE: TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO CLASSIFYING UNIONS IN AUSTRALIA 2
  Conventional Typologies of Unionism 2
  Functionally-Based Approaches to Classification 5
  How Should We Characterise Australian Unions? 7
  Overview of Typologies 9

PART TWO: THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT OF AUSTRALIAN UNIONISM 12
  Policy/Regulatory Change 12
  Employer Approaches to Unions 13
  Structural Change in Industry and Labour Markets 15

PART THREE: THE AUSTRALIAN DATA AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF AUSTRALIAN UNIONS 16
  Structural Dimensions of Unions and Unionism 16
  Strategic Dimensions of Unions and Unionism 22
  Gaps in Our Knowledge and Additional Data Required 26

PART FOUR: TOWARDS A NEW CLASSIFICATORY SYSTEM 30
  A New Structurally-based Typology? 31
  A New Strategically-based Typology? 35

CONCLUSION 37

REFERENCES 38

APPENDIX A: KEY DATA SOURCES ON THE AUSTRALIAN UNION MOVEMENT 45
  A Select and Annotated Listing of Relevant Data Sources 46

APPENDIX B: A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS 51
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research reported in this paper was made possible by a grant from the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT). We would like to thank ACIRRT for providing this funding, and also to register our appreciation to Associate Professor Ron Callus for his extraordinarily liberal approach to the enforcement of deadlines.

We also owe thanks to a number of individuals and organisations. Firstly, Mark West did an outstanding job as a research assistant during 1995. Secondly, we would like to thank Professor Don Rawson of the Australian National University for his generous and helpful advice and for the inspiration which his long history of work on union organisation provided. Finally, we owe thanks to the numerous academics, unionists and public servants who helped us in our search for literature and data.
INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to make both theoretical and empirical contributions to our understanding of the changing nature of Australian trade unionism. Its central aims are twofold. Firstly, it seeks to build on existing classificatory systems for unions, which have chiefly been typologies or functional classifications, by proposing a system which classifies unions on the basis of their strategic orientations and their environments. Secondly, the paper provides a detailed and comprehensive review of both the literature and the data concerning classificatory systems, both as a means to guide other researchers and to indicate the areas in which further work is required.

The paper is divided into four main parts. In the first, we consider the two main ways in which Australian industrial relations scholars have sought to classify and make sense of unions. The first approach considered is the use of typologies of unions, based on characteristics such as membership, structural environment and internal organisational features. Secondly, we deal with functionally-based approaches; those which make sense of unions in terms of what they do. On the basis of this discussion, we reach two conclusions: firstly, that the two defining features of Australian unionism are its high degree of institutionalisation - via Australia’s distinctive industrial relations system - and its lack of coherent structures across national, sectoral, enterprise and workplace levels; and, secondly, that the most fruitful direction for theory development is the pursuit of a framework which considers links between the environment in which unions operate, union structures and union strategies.

As a first step in exploring the way in which environmental changes interact with the distinctively institutionalised and poorly articulated nature of Australian unions, Part 2 of the paper provides an overview of the key, recent, environmental changes. These are grouped under the headings of policy/regulatory changes, employer approaches to unions and structural changes to industry and labour markets. We identify the decentralisation of industrial relations; the pursuit of a range of “hard” and “soft” anti-union measures by employers; and, the growth of white-collar, service-sector and irregular employment as being the more important environmental factors likely to have an impact on the nature of unionism.

In Part 3, we review the available data on the Australian trade union movement. Drawing chiefly on published Australian Bureau of Statistics data, we seek to identify the major changes in the nature of unionism, concentrating chiefly on structural features. Specifically, we deal with union size, coverage/membership density, the composition of membership, and the location of unions within the economy. On the basis of this discussion we draw a number of substantive conclusions about the changing features of unions. However, we also identify major gaps in publicly available data in terms of information concerning internal union organisation, relations between unions, and strategic dimensions of unionism, which need to be filled if we are to properly characterise Australian unionism.
Finally, in Part 4 we investigate the possibilities of developing new structurally-based and strategically-based typologies of Australian unionism. We argue that while the new system of Australian unions can be classified in terms of a revised structural typology, the development of a more sophisticated classificatory system that integrates both structural and strategic features requires the collection and analysis of detailed union-level survey-based data. Nevertheless, on the basis of our assessment of traditional union strategies and the nature of recent changes it is possible to identify three alternative “strategic orientations” likely to be emergent, and in conclusion we contrast “militant-economistic unionism” “managerialist-service unionism” and “articulated-institutional unionism”. The paper also includes two appendices which provide a listing of publicly available data and literature (respectively) relevant to the project. This is intended to provide a resource to others working in the area of Australian trade union theory.

PART ONE: TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO CLASSIFYING UNIONS IN AUSTRALIA

The logical starting point for a project which seeks to generate a new classification system for Australian unions is consideration of already existing approaches to classification. Traditionally, there have been two main approaches adopted in Australia. The first has involved the generation of typologies, on the basis of a range of features of unions, while the second had featured functionally-derived definitions. In this part of the paper, each approach is reviewed briefly. We then ask, how can we characterise Australian unionism in terms of the frameworks provided by these two approaches?

Conventional Typologies of Unionism

In “Anglo” industrial relations scholarship the use of typologies has long been a popular means of thinking about unionism. Typologies of unions or unionism - systematic classifications of types of union or approaches to unionism - necessarily mark out a range of union characteristics and thereby say something about the range of possibilities for unions. They are theoretical in that sense, as well as being theoretical in that, at best, they disclose implicit claims about relations between different characteristics of unions. For example, Turner’s (1962) notion of “open” unions discloses the theoretical proposition that general unions that organise widely will tend to centralise power and develop into what he termed “popular bossdoms”.

Structurally-Based Typologies

Many traditional typologies are rather less theoretically ambitious and are based on a description of structural characteristics. The most common typologies have categorised unions according to their membership (Gardner, 1989). The traditional British classification of “craft”, “industry” and “general” has been re-worked in the Australian context many times.

1 Parts 1 and 2 of the paper draw on our earlier work on union theory (See Hall and Harley, 1995, 1996).
Dabscheck and Niland (1981) added "house unions" - enterprise specific unions that operate across a single organisation - and "occupational unions" - which organised occupationally related workers beyond just the relatively narrow craft or trade definitions. Although the Commonwealth Bank Officers' Association (a classic example of a "house union") did not finally and formally merge into the Finance Sector Union of Australia until 1994, by 1991 Deery and Plowman had opted for a taxonomy of craft, occupational, industry and general unions.

More recently structural typologies have been linked to accounts of union power and behaviour. As the amalgamation debates raged and as enterprise bargaining was gaining momentum Drago, Wooden and Sloan (1992) argued for a distinction between "craft", "industry" and "enterprise" unionism. Their typology is notable for its greater integration of structural and strategic considerations. They suggest that while the strategies promoted by craft or industrial unionism held certain advantages for unions, only enterprise unionism was able to provide significant advantages for both management and workers (Drago, Wooden and Sloan, 1992: 51).

Other typologies point to the external structural environment in which unions operate. For example Blain (1985) distinguishes Australian unions according to the nature of their registration arrangements, identifying "federal" unions, "state" unions and "complementary" unions. Following Martin (1989), whose internationally comparative survey points to the significance of union-party and union-state relations, Australian unions can also be classified according to their affiliation with the ALP, state Trades and Labor Councils and the ACTU (Dufty and Fells, 1989: 153-5).

Systems of classification can also be derived from the internal organisational features of unions. Barling, Fullagher and Kelloway (1992) have applied Pugh et al.'s five dimensions of organisations - specialisation, standardisation, formalisation, centralisation, configuration - to their studies of unions. Pugh et al. defined "specialisation" as in terms of the distribution of roles and responsibilities within the organisation; "standardisation" referred to the degree to which organisations stipulated procedures for dealing with various personnel processes and grievances; "formalisation" looks at the extent to which these and other organisational roles, procedures and rules are documented; "centralisation" was defined by the level at which decisions are made; and, "configuration" is defined in terms of the number of hierarchical levels and the breadth of the responsibilities of managers and subordinates (Barling, Fullagher and Kelloway, 1992: 12).

Other Australian studies that have focused on the organisational characteristics of different unions have looked specifically at the functional organisation of union staff. Callus's (1986) delineation of union staff into executive officers, organisers and salaried experts has recently been combined with Heery and Kelly's (1994) typology and applied to Australian union development (Bramble, 1995). While not providing a typology Bramble argues that the growth in the number of full-time officials in Australian unions in recent times (relative to members) may be linked to a diminution of rank and file democracy and an increasing tendency to pursue a form of "managerial unionism" (Heery and Kelly, 1994) in which unions pursue improved direct servicing of members rather than traditional
industrial objectives. While Bramble’s argument is controversial it is valuable for pointing again to the possibility of linking internal organisational attributes with strategy.

Despite the significant amount of research undertaken on union organisation and democracy, few, if any, Australian typologies have been based on forms of union government. Claims have been made concerning the relative degree of bureaucracy or participation that characterises different unions (Fairbrother and Waddington, 1990) and Child et al.’s identification of the conflicts between the administrative and bureaucratic rationality of unions has been influential, but neither has led to a genuine typology. Similarly, Davis’s studies of union democracy (1981; 1987) link different democratic practices to the predominant collar colour of the membership but do not lead to a new taxonomy.

The different unions’ workplace presence (or absence) also emerges as a likely source for typologies based on the internal organisational characteristics of unions, although the most systematic studies of workplace industrial relations have been used to generate typologies of workplace institutions and practices rather than of unions. Littler, Quinlan and Kitay’s development of a new conceptual framework, for example, resulted in a typology of workplace industrial relations regulatory regimes (1989: 516). Following on from that work Callus et al. applied a five-way typology based on patterns of workplace bargaining to the AWIRS data (1991). Callus et al. identified “informal workplaces” which were union free, “unstructured inactive workplaces” which were unionised but where there was very little union workplace activity, “structured inactive workplaces” which were unionised and in which the union had established a degree of formalisation of rules and procedures but in which there was no workplace level bargaining, and “active bargainers” in which unions engaged in genuine workplace level bargaining. While not providing a typology of unions, this study, like that of Benson’s which offers a typology of shop stewards rather than a new taxonomy of unions (1991), points to the need to address the workplace presence of different unions as a potentially critical dimension of union organisation.

Strategically-Based Typologies

The second broad approach to the construction of union typologies has started with the delineation of the different strategies commonly pursued by different unions. These approaches tend to lean more toward a characterisation of the union’s prevailing ideology or an identification of the methods commonly pursued. Hoxie’s very well known typology of “business”, “friendly”, “revolutionary” and “predatory” unionism appears to have limited application to the Australian case (with the possible exception of the first and fourth categories) although his general admonition that unionism is essentially a pragmatic business has had a continuing resonance with Australian commentators and practitioners (eg: Dufty and Fells, 1989: 116).

While ideology and ideological battles have had a notable influence on the history of the Australian labour movement there are few compelling contemporary typologies that are based on the ideological distinctions
amongst Australian unions. Despite the significant effects of syndicalism, communism and Catholicism at different times in Australian union history, labourism has been normally identified as the dominant ideological force cutting across the majority of Australian unions. Frenkel and Coolican though, in their study of the BWIU and the AMFSU, were able to identify “radicalism” as a significant ideological alternative to “labourism” for a minority of Australian trade union officials and activists (1984: 1).

Other models and typologies based on union strategy look toward the rather more concrete and immediate questions of union aims or methods. The classic taxonomic statement on union methods comes from the Webbs (1911) who identified methods of “unilateral regulation”, “legal enactment” and “collective bargaining”. The three types of union identified by the Webbs were, by and large defined by the methods available to them: craft unions could rely on unilateral regulation, “promotion” unions used a combination of unilateral regulation and collective bargaining and unions of the semi-skilled and unskilled relied on collective bargaining.

Turner’s (1962) study combines attention to both union structure and union method proposing, as did the Webbs, causal connections between the two. Turner’s three-way typology is linked in part to methods of union government: closed, craft-based unions typically have decision making structures and procedures characterised by “exclusive democracy”; the partially open, occupational union will be dominated by an aristocratic class of the more powerful, more highly skilled membership groups; the fully open, general union will tend toward centralised democratic procedures (Dufty and Fells, 1989: 152).

Gardner (1989) revisits both the path-breaking work of the Webbs and the more contemporary contribution of Turner in her attempt to integrate structure and method in a model of trade union strategy. Her model of strategy is made up of eight dimensions including the arena in which unions act, the level at which negotiations are conducted, the degree of membership involvement, the use of industrial and political tactics and methods, the nature of inter-union relationships, whether the union is a campaign leader or follower and union ideology (1989: 56). Gardner though does not carry through to the proposal of a strategically based typology, but rather provides a fairly comprehensive set of strategic continua against which union behaviour can be measured. Nevertheless, her work certainly establishes a set of continua that can be used to generate a typology of union strategy (for a first attempt see Hall and Harley, 1995).

Union typologies range from the descriptive to the analytical. Descriptive typologies will tend to focus on one dimension of union characteristics; the more analytical will base their categorisation on the covariation of a number of variables. Where those variables or dimensions include both structural and strategic characteristics, the identification of union types suggests some causal connections that might form the basis for theories of union behaviour.

The other dominant approach to classifying unions has involved consideration of functional definitions of unions.

Functionally-Based Approaches to Classification
Theories of the labour movement in capitalist society have proposed a range of grand purposes for trade unionism. Syndicalists have seen unions as the vehicles for social emancipation, Leninists have posited the role of the union in the service of the revolutionary vanguard party, Marxists of varying persuasions have dismissed or embraced the revolutionary capacity of unions, while “organicists” have seen unions as a manifestation of the psychological reaction of workers to capitalism.

From an avowedly reformist position the Webbs proposed one of the enduring functional definitions of a trade union as “a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives” (Webb and Webb, 1896 in Martin, 1989: 8). Equally sensible is Allen’s contribution that the “prime aim” of unions “and the one from which others flow, is to protect and improve the living standards of their members” (Allen, 1967: 241).

The appeal in Allen’s definition lies in its breadth and its capacity to recognise the range of forces that can affect the “living standards of members”. The Webbs classic definition, however, turns on the interpretation of “working lives”. Interpreted narrowly to mean the “conditions of work”, it leads to a bare pluralist description of unions as one of the institutions of “job regulation” (Flanders, 1965). At one level, the long history of the numerous critiques of industrial relations pluralism and pluralism more generally warn against adopting such a superficial definition. At another level, even a cursory consideration of Australian unionism confirms that unions do much more than regulate jobs. From the Inter-Colonial Trade Union Congress in 1879 to the BLF’s green bans of the early 1970s and the Accords of 1983 - 1996, Australian unions have always demonstrated a capacity to act on issues beyond the immediate conditions of work of their members. The point is that a useful functional definition or classification system of unionism must be able to accommodate union behaviour that includes organising and mobilising around issues and claims that affect the whole gamut of workers’ living standards. That range of issues and claims must include macroeconomic outcomes, macroeconomic policies, the operation and regulation of labour markets, the organisation of work, patterns of investment, industry policy and finance policy as well as wages and conditions of work.

This does not amount to a rejection of unionism pure and simple. We agree with Dabscheck’s recent defence of unionism per se in the face of intellectualism (1995: 117-139). However, an adequate understanding of unionism demands its analysis at a number of levels, other than just the level of the individual union member at their workplace. At the macroeconomic level, studies in comparative political economy have demonstrated the effects of different levels and forms of union organisation on unemployment rates, welfare state expenditure and macroeconomic policy-making more generally (Boreham and Hall, 1994). Other studies point to the importance of union mobilisation in the development and application of successful industry policy (Evatt Foundation, 1995). We know that unions can exert a critical influence on the structuring of labour markets whether through award restructuring and participation in the development of a national training and skills standards (as in Australia) (Ewer et al., 1991), or through direct participation in active labour market programs (as in northern
Europe). Similarly there is considerable evidence as to what unions do at the workplace level. Freeman and Medoff have established that unions can have a positive effect on workplace productivity, interest aggregation and communication (1984: 75). Recent Australian research also indicates that unions have had a positive effect on the outcomes associated with the enterprise bargaining process, especially in terms of increasing employee consultation (Boreham, Hall, Harley and Whitehouse, 1995).

The living standards of union members are critically affected by the outcomes of political struggles and policy debates at a number of levels - workplace, labour market sector, industry sector and national. Unions have a role to play at each of these levels. Therefore, if we wish to classify unions in terms of what they do, we must develop a framework which is able to accommodate different patterns of union behaviour across each of these levels.

Gardner’s attempt to develop a theory of union strategy is one of the most helpful in this sense. She suggests that a theory of union strategy should be constructed across eight dimensions of union behaviour (noted above) and three external dimensions she refers to as “political, market and management factors” (1989: 65). But while Gardner provides a framework which can be used to classify unions in terms of their behaviour, she does not propose a theory of union behaviour and provides no strong answer to the question: why do particular sorts of unions pursue particular sorts of strategies?

Australian industrial relations and political economy scholarship can claim a fairly impressive body of research that contributes to our understanding of the nature and character of Australian unionism generally. For example, we know a great deal about the distinctive character of Australian unionism as a result of studies of labourism (Castles, 1988; Ewer et al., 1991; Macintyre, 1986). Howard’s (1977) thesis of Australian unionism being, in some senses, dependent on the arbitration system has drawn attention to the links between structure and strategy. More recent debates about the character of political or strategic unionism have also helped us clarify the nature of contemporary Australian unionism. All of these contributions are useful in the interpretation of change and its effects on Australian unionism generally, but they do little to explain the variance in the behaviour of particular unions.

**How Should We Characterise Australian Unions?**

The strongest contributions to union theory integrate structure and strategy. The structural preconditions for labourism, and indeed Accordism, can be seen in the relations between unions and the state, employers and (in the case of Accordism) the ALP. Howard’s thesis is a very direct assertion of links between the structural environment of the Australian union movement and union behaviour. Clegg’s *Trade Unionism under Collective Bargaining* (1976) is one of the strongest examples of this theoretical tradition, explicity linking union behaviour to the structure of collective bargaining. If this theoretical tradition is worth pursuing further then it strongly suggests that we analyse links between changes to external and internal union structures and changes to union strategy.
In the next part of the paper, we document something of the specific dimensions of changes which we argue should be taken into account in classifying and interpreting different union approaches. However, before moving to that discussion, we need to ask how, in the terms of the approaches discussed above, Australian unionism should be characterised. From a comparative perspective the labourism of Australian unionism cannot be doubted. Australian unions have generally used the arbitration system and award flow-ons as the principal mechanism of improving the living conditions of their members. Wage increases and the fairly detailed regulation of work conditions have been the principal strategic focus. While the award system has obviously been central it has always been underpinned by collective bargaining (Dabscheck and Niland, 1981). We would not necessarily agree that Australian unionism has been weakened, or left dependent by the history of arbitration. Rather, we see the two principal features of Australian unionism as its highly institutionalised character, and its relatively low degree of articulation across the levels of unionism. The relatively high degree of institutionalisation of unionism is reflected in the extensive statutory and legal regulation of union organisation and mobilisation (Macintyre and Mitchell, 1989; Hall, 1995). Articulation here refers to the extent of union organisation and the coherence of those structures across national, sectoral, enterprise and workplace levels (Thelen, 1991; Crouch, 1992; Boreham and Hall, 1994).
Overview of Typologies

Table 1 sets out some of the major typologies of unions and unionism reviewed above.

**Table 1: Union Typologies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union Typology</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structural Typologies</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>craft; industry; general.</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>craft; industry; general; house.</td>
<td>Dabscheck and Niland (1981)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>craft; occupational; industry; general.</td>
<td>Deery and Plowman (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>craft; industry; enterprise.</td>
<td>Drago, Wooden and Sloan (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blue-collar; white-collar.</td>
<td>Deery and Plowman (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>federal; state; complementary.</td>
<td>Blain (1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP affiliated; non-affiliated.</td>
<td>Dufty and Fells (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLC affiliated; non-affiliated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTU affiliated; non-affiliated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional; participative; managerial.</td>
<td>Heery and Kelly (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bureaucratic; participative.</td>
<td>from Davis (1981, 1987); Fairbrother and Waddington (1990); Bramble (1995).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>workplace absent; workplace inactive; workplace active.</td>
<td>from Littler, Quinlan and Kitay (1989); Callus, Morehead, Cully and Buchanan (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Typologies</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>business; friendly; revolutionary; predatory.</td>
<td>Hoxie (1919)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>radical; labourist.</td>
<td>Frenkel and Coolican (1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unilateral regulation (craft unions, promotion unions); legal enactment; collective bargaining (promotion unions, unskilled/semi-skilled unions).</td>
<td>the Webbs (1911)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: Union Typologies (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union Typology (continued)</th>
<th>Source (contented)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Typologies (continued)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closed (exclusive democracy); partially open (skilled aristocracy); fully open (centralised democracy).</td>
<td>Turner (1962).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. centralised negotiations; decentralised negotiations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. concentrated decision-making; diffused decision-making.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. autonomous job regulation; collective bargaining; arbitration; political action.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. narrow range of tactics; broad range of tactics.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. isolated; integrated/ conflictual; cooperative.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. campaign follower; campaign leader.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. leadership discretion ideology; united action ideology; autonomous action ideology.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>industrial introverts (narrow industrial focus with an inward orientation); industrial extroverts (narrow industrial focus with an outward orientation); socio-political introverts (broader social and political focus with an inward orientation); socio-political extroverts (broader social and political focus with an outward orientation)</td>
<td>Hall and Harley (1996)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 is not, of course, attempting to provide an exhaustive account of union typologies. First, the typologies have been selected because they have a potential or actual application to the Australian case. Second, typologies of union movements as distinct from typologies of unions have not been
included here. While union movement typologies can be used as the basis of union typologies their applicability to the contemporary structure of Australian unions seems limited. For example Cella and Treu’s (1990) typology of union movements (opposition unionism; business unionism; competitive unionism; participatory unionism; state-sponsored unionism) is illuminating, but it is designed to capture national level characteristics and remains poorly suited to the distinctions amongst individual Australian unions. Thirdly, no attempt has been made to translate the functional definitions of unions into explicit union typologies. Functional definitions, on their own, do not generate very useful typologies. For example Martin’s (1989) analysis of the theories of trade union purpose results in a familiar five way typology: Pluralist; Syndicalist; Marxist-Leninist; Organicist; Authoritarian. It would be difficult to categorise contemporary Australian unions as anything other than “pluralist” in those terms.

Our own typology (Hall and Harley, 1995) tries to build on the earlier typologies, the theories of union function and purpose, and on the synthesising work of Gardner (1989). Our idea of distinguishing between a narrow industrial focus and a broader social and political focus is derived from discussions about the purpose of unionism and the distinction drawn in comparative political economy between industrial and political arenas of conflict (Korpi, 1986) as well as from Gardner’s first dimension. The distinction between an inward and outward orientation attempts to contrast a defensive tendency to protect the conditions and entitlements of existing members, largely in isolation from broader labour market, economic and political considerations and a more progressive tendency to enhance the conditions enjoyed by current and potential members in the context of other labour market, economic and political goals. The distinction has been influenced by Freeman and Medoff’s (1979, 1984) celebrated identification of two faces of unionism: a monopoly face through which unions increase members’ wages and conditions, increasing inequality, lowering productivity and hardening relations between unions, and a collective-voice/institutional-response face through which unions can facilitate communication between workers and managers, increasing productivity, efficiency and equity. Our “introvert”-”extrovert” distinction also draws on the contrast made, especially by European commentators, between inclusive or solidaristic unionism and exclusive or sectionalist unionism. While the former manifests a cognisance of the breadth of the entire union movement, and relies on a level of cooperation and coherence amongst unions, the latter is more focused on the achievement of individual gains by individual unions, even if at the expense of other unions or workers. This exclusive-inclusive distinction is also closely paralleled by Gardner’s (1989) distinctions between “isolated” and “integrated” unions and “conflictual” and “cooperative” unions.

The application of these typologies to the current structure of Australian unionism is considered in Part 4 of the paper. Before undertaking that task the changing environment and nature of Australian unionism is discussed.
PART TWO: THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT OF AUSTRALIAN UNIONISM

In this part of the paper, we consider the changing nature of the environment in which Australian unions operate. The key environmental changes considered here can be grouped under three headings. These are: policy/regulatory changes; changes of approach to unions by employers; and structural changes in industry and the labour market. These categories, and the particular issues discussed within each of them, are by no means exhaustive. We would argue, however, that they are areas of particular importance in making sense of the predicament facing Australian trade unions. It should also be made clear from the outset that, while we treat the changes as discrete, in practice many of them are intertwined.

Policy/Regulatory Change

The ALP Governments (1983-96)

During the period of the Hawke and Keating governments, there were three major policy developments which had an impact on the union movement. The first of these was the Accord(s) between the ALP and the ACTU. There has been vigorous debate about the advantages and disadvantages for labour of the Accord (see for example: Ewer et al., 1991). Nonetheless, it seems undeniable that it represented a unique foray into political unionism for the Australian union movement, albeit a short-lived and probably unsuccessful one. By 1987, however, the impetus of deregulation and economic rationalism had overtaken the macroeconomic and social policy gains sought by labour.

The second important change to the policy environment was associated with the drive for union amalgamations which commenced in the 1980s. Starting in 1983, the federal government introduced a series of legislative changes which were aimed at making union amalgamation simpler. The ACTU has continued to champion the process of amalgamation since that time (ACTU, 1987). The result has been an increasing number of amalgamations and a corresponding concentration of membership in a decreasing number of very large unions.

Thirdly, concurrent with these policy changes, which appear to have encouraged moves towards centralisation and rationalisation of union structures and activities, there was a steady decentralisation of industrial relations under the Labor governments. Very briefly, this involved an increasing emphasis, via the "second tier", "award restructuring" and "enterprise bargaining", on the negotiation of wages and conditions at a local level (see Harley, 1995, Chapter 5). Associated with this was a reduction in the role of the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC).

Thus, the three major policy/regulatory changes can be seen as, to some extent at least, pulling in opposite directions. On one hand, the Accord and the amalgamation process can be seen as pulling unions in the direction of centralised decision-making arrangements and intervention via politics,
rather than via workplace level action. On the other, the steady decentralisation meant pressure on unions to mobilise and to take a proactive approach at the workplace or enterprise level.

The Coalition Government (1996- )

While it is perhaps too early to draw any firm conclusions about the impact of the policies of the Howard government, two things appear clear about the intent of their recently enacted legislative change. Firstly, the process of decentralisation which commenced under Labor will continue. The policies put in place by the Workplace Relations Act 1996 appear to be aimed squarely at marginalising the award system and the IRC, and placing increased emphasis on workplace level negotiations (DIR, 1996). In this sense, the environmental pressures which were present under the Labor government will intensify.

Secondly, while the Workplace Relations Act 1996 increases the pressure for decentralisation, its proposed legislative changes can be expected to place a number of obstacles in the way of unions pursuing their activities at the workplace level. Among the more important of these are: the establishment of the system of Australian Workplace Agreements; the removal of the ‘conveniently belong’ rule; provision for the registration of enterprise unions; provision for disamalgamation of unions; removal of union right of entry; and the restoration of secondary boycotts provisions to the Trade Practices Act (DIR, 1996: 4-5).

Employer Approaches to Unions

The policy changes which the newly elected Federal government has sought to enact reflect, to a large extent, the prescriptions of a number of employer groups, most notably the Business Council of Australia (BCA), which has pushed consistently for decentralisation, deregulation and a reduced role for unions (see BCA, 1989). As well as influencing policy at the macro-level, some employers have pursued workplace or enterprise-level strategies which pose particular problems for unions.

The approaches adopted by employers can be divided into two categories: “hard” and “soft”. The first can be characterised as “union busting”. That is, some employers have sought direct confrontation in an attempt to exclude unions from their workplaces. Probably the best-known example of this is the strategy employed by CRA at various sites, involving the use of individual contracts, bolstered by legal action against shop-stewards and strikers, as a means to marginalise unions (see Davis, 1995).

The alternative “soft” approach involves the use of a variety of HRM techniques, such as teamwork, as a means to reduce the likelihood of employees joining unions. While there has been little detailed research on this phenomenon, anecdotal evidence suggests that a number of companies in the mining industry have chosen this approach as an alternative to the confrontationalist approach adopted by CRA. The essential rationale for this approach is that if employees feel that they are in charge of their own work and have opportunities for input to decisions about how they do their jobs, they are likely to feel relatively satisfied with their lot and thus be less likely
to seek influence over their work by joining a union. Ewer provides a brief
discussion of the use of teams in Hammersley Iron, which illustrates this
approach and the threats it poses for unions (1995).

The small amount of empirical work on this topic suggests that the impact
of such managerial strategies can be mediated significantly by the approach
adopted by unions themselves. Peetz, in his study of factors influencing
union membership decisions concludes that

the relationship between [unionisation and] management
strategies aimed at building employee trust of management is a
contingent one. In particular, it is predominantly conditional
upon whether unions are adequately serving their members. If
members are satisfied with their union, if the union is active and
well-represented, then management efforts to develop more
inclusive work relationships will do no harm to unionisation.
Indeed, unionisation might even be enhanced. But if unions are
not representing their members properly, management can
circumvent unions altogether. It can do this by weakening
employee attachment to unions through a strengthening of
employee attachment to the firm, including through the promotion
of employee involvement and financial participation. This
conjunction of union neglect and managerial incorporation can
lead, not just to members quitting their unions, but to the de-
unionisation of entire workplaces and the expansion of non-union

In addition to deliberate attempts to marginalise unions, employers have
also sought to introduce a range of new forms of work organisation in the
past decade. Usually justified in terms of their capacity to enhance
“flexibility”, a range of practices have been adopted by Australian
workplaces in recent years.

While again the research in this area is relatively underdeveloped, analysis
conducted by the authors, using the AWIRS data set, provides some pointers
concerning the implications of these new forms of work organisation (Hall
and Harley, 1993; Harley, 1994, 1995). In a general sense, our analyses
suggest that practices which we classify as labour market flexibility pose
very real threats to the capacity of unions to recruit and organise workers.
On the other hand, some forms of labour process flexibility appear to
provide avenues for union influence over the organisation of production. In
each case, however, it is clear that unions are not simply passive recipients
of employer attempts to introduce new forms of work organisation. Rather,
they are able to play a role in influencing the forms of flexibility introduced,
and the ways in which they are introduced, and thereby have an impact on
the outcomes of changes to work organisation.
Structural Change in Industry and Labour Markets

The structure of Australian industry has changed profoundly in recent years. Traditionally, it has been characterised by the prominence of primary production and, to a much lesser extent, manufacturing. This structure has provided conditions favourable to unionisation by virtue of its tendency to concentrate workers in large-scale industries, thereby making it easier for unions to organise and mobilise employees. More recently, however, there has been a remarkable growth in so-called "service industries", such as hospitality and recreation. According to the OECD, Australia has one of the highest proportions of service sector employment among the advanced economies (OECD, 1994).

These sectors of the economy tend to be characterised by relatively low levels of unionisation. For example, in August 1994, only 19% of employees in accommodation, cafes and restaurants, 15% in property and business services and 24% in recreational services were union members, compared to 41% in manufacturing and 45% in mining (ABS, 1995b). Further, significant parts of the service industry appear to be characterised by relatively high levels of managerial hostility to unions (see Harley, 1994: Chapter 5, for a discussion of this with reference to the finance sector).

There have also been significant changes to the occupational structure in Australia. For most of the twentieth century, as has been the case across the industrialised countries, a large proportion of workers have been men, employed in blue-collar occupations. Traditionally, such workers, employed in manufacturing and primary production, have been the backbone of the union movement. More recently, there have been increases in the participation of women in paid employment, many of whom work in white-collar occupations in the service industry, reducing the relative proportion of employment in traditional, male, blue-collar work.

In addition to occupational change, there has been a recent and dramatic shift in employment away from full-time and permanent jobs and towards part-time and/or casual jobs. Indeed, this is perhaps the most dramatic change in the Australian labour market over the past twenty years, with close to one quarter of all employees now working part-time, and over 70% of all part-time jobs being casual (Harley, 1994: 71). Again, part-time and casual workers tend less often to be unionised than their full-time and permanent counterparts. In 1994, 41% of permanent employees were union members compared to 15% of casuals and 39% of full-time employees compared to only 23% of those who worked part-time (ABS, 1995b).

The environmental changes outlined above can be summarised as involving: a profound decentralisation of industrial relations, concurrent with a reduction of the centralising tendencies characteristic of the early 1980s and the introduction of a range of anti-union measures by the federal government; the increasing pursuit of a range of "hard" and "soft" anti-union measures by employers, as well as a range of new forms of work organisation which, potentially at least, pose problems for unions; and structural change in the form of growth of service industries, increased employment of women in white-collar jobs in this growing part of the
economy and the growth of various forms of "irregular" employment. While we would argue that unions are not simply the passive recipients of these changes, but have a role to play in influencing them, it is clear that the environment facing the labour movement is very different from that which has existed for most of the twentieth century.

PART THREE: THE AUSTRALIAN DATA AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF AUSTRALIAN UNIONS

This part of the paper considers some of the key publicly-available data concerning structural and strategic aspects of the Australian trade union movement. Our aim here is twofold. Firstly, it is to present as accurate a picture as possible of the shape of the union movement in the 1990s. Secondly, in keeping with our argument that a useful classification system must integrate consideration of environment, structure and strategy, we aim to identify the key characteristics of unions, with an emphasis on change. This information can then be integrated with our earlier discussion of the character of Australian unionism and of environmental change, as a means to inform our conclusions concerning a classification system. In the discussion which follows, we first consider structural dimensions of unionism, before moving to strategic issues.

Structural Dimensions of Unions and Unionism

Size

Historically, Australia has been characterised by a large number of small unions (Rawson, 1986: 35-7), but recent trends have been towards a smaller number of unions, with an increase in the number of very large ones. In large part, this can be explained by the recent program of union amalgamations. In the year to 30 June 1994, no less than 40 unions amalgamated to form 13 unions (ABS, 1994). Between 30 June 1989 and 30 June 1995, the number of separate unions in Australia decreased from 299 to 142 (ABS, 1994, 1995a). As of June 1996 the figure had decreased further to 132 (ABS, 1996).

As of 30 June 1990, 7 unions had over 100,000 members, accounting for 30% of all union members in Australia, while at 30 June 1996 the number had increased to 12, with those 12 accounting for 71% of all union members (ABS, 1994, 1996). At the other end of the scale, as of 30 June 1990, 136 unions had less than 1000 members, and accounted for 1% of members, while in 1996 only 62 unions were of this size and they accounted for only 0.6% of members (ABS, 1994, 1996).

At the level of the union movement as a whole, the trend is clearly towards a concentration of membership in fewer, larger unions. Nonetheless, in terms of unions rather than of the union movement, it is clear that a large (if significantly decreasing) proportion of unions are quite small. As of 30 June 1996, 21 unions, comprising 16% of all unions, had memberships of less

---

2 Appendix A provides an annotated listing of key sources of data.
than 100 (ABS, 1995a). A further 30 unions (23%) had between 100 and 500 members. Unions with less than 2000 members made up 58% of all unions.

Unfortunately, the ABS data do not allow us to identify individual unions in different size categories. This limitation in the data can be overcome to some extent by information contained in the ACTU’s annual *National Union Directory and Diary* (see for example ACTU, 1995), which provides membership numbers for the majority of ACTU affiliated unions. Obviously, since this document is restricted to ACTU affiliates and since not all provide membership numbers, it cannot be regarded as comprehensive. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify individual unions in particular size bands and thereby gain some indication of the characteristics associated with different union sizes.

According to this directory, the following ACTU-affiliated unions had memberships of 100,000 or more in 1996: Australian Education Union (AEU) (164,732); Australian Services Union (ASU) (180,000); Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union (AMWU) (171,334\(^3\)); AWU Union (170,000); Communications, Electrical, Electronic, Energy, Information, Postal, Plumbing and Allied Services Union of Australia (CEPU) (180,000\(^4\)); Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) (120,000); Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) (270,000); Finance Sector Union of Australia (FSU) (110,000); Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LH MU\(^5\)) (211,000); National Union of Workers (NUW) (110,000); Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA) (223,000). As well as being ACTU-affiliated, these very large unions have in common that they are federally registered and that all have been created post-1991 (most since 1993) as part of the ACTU’s program of union amalgamations (Jadeja, 1994).

At the other end of the scale, the following ACTU affiliates had less than 1000 members: Association of Railway Professional Officers of Australia (ARPOA) (900); Blind Workers Union of Victoria (50); Breweries and Bottleyards Employees Industrial Union of Workers, WA (BBEIUW (WA)) (270); Dental Technicians Association of NSW (DTA) (170); Funeral and Allied Industries Union of NSW (F & AI) (441); Independent Schools Staff Association (ACT) (ISSA ACT) (765); Salaried Pharmacists Association (SPA) (900); Salaried Pharmacists Association of WA Union of Workers (SPA of WA) (60); Union of Christmas Island Workers (UCIW) (800\(^6\)); WA Dental Technicians and Employees Union of Workers (DTEU) (27); and Woolclassers Association of Australia (WAA) (900). Although these represent only a tiny proportion of the 62 unions in this size band which existed in 1996 (ABS, 1996), they may provide some indication of the characteristics of small unions. Undoubtedly, they demonstrate that unions with under 1000 members tend not to be ACTU affiliated. Further, they tend to be narrowly occupationally-based and often restricted to one state.

**Coverage/Density**

\(^3\) This is a 1995 figure. No membership figure is provided for 1996.

\(^4\) 1995 figure.

\(^5\) 1995 figure.

\(^6\) 1995 figure.
There has been a profound decline in the level of union membership over the past decade. Between 30 June 1989 and 30 June 1994, trade union members as a percentage of total employees, decreased from 52% to 40% according to figures collected from trade unions (ABS, 1994, 1995a). The figure remained at 40% in 1996 (ABS, 1996). According to data collected from employees, in a supplementary survey to the ABS Labour Force Survey, the decline appears even more alarming, with the figure for August 1988 being 42% and that for August 1994 35% (ABS, 1995b)⁷.

Further, while the trend throughout the twentieth century has been for the overall number of trade union members to increase, even during the recent decline in density (Gardner and Palmer, 1992: 85), more recently the absolute number of trade union members has begun to drop. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' survey of unions, as of 30 June 1989 there were 3,410,300 union members (2,988,400 financial members) in Australia (ABS, 1994). By 30 June 1995, this had decreased by 654,000 to 2,756,300 (2,439, 700 financial) (ABS, 1995a). The figures remained largely unchanged as of June 1996. It should be noted that, because these data are based on figures provided to the ABS by unions, the dramatic decline between 1989 and 1995 may reflect issues associated with union amalgamation, rather than a real drop of this magnitude. Figures from the ABS Labour Force Survey (that is, based on responses from workers themselves) show a less dramatic decline, with a drop of 252,500 between August 1988 (2,535,900 members) and August 1994 (2,283,400 members) (ABS, 1995b). Nonetheless, even the lower figure represents a very significant decline in the number of union members.

When we turn to the question of coverage at the level of individual unions, it is difficult to draw any significant conclusions based on existing information. To characterise unions as having high or low coverage rates would require identifying the potential constituencies of individual unions and then comparing the proportion of potential members who had joined with the proportion who had not. While it might be possible to gain such figures from individual unions (although there would be a number of problems attendant upon doing so), the publicly available data sources do not provide this information.

**Composition of Membership**

As well as a generalised decline in union density in recent years, there have been significant changes to the composition of union membership in Australia. Firstly, while the density rates for both men and women are declining, the ratio of male to female union members has not remained constant. As shown in Figure 1, in 1982 33% of all union members were women. In 1988 this had increased to 35% of union members, in 1990 to 37% and in 1994, 40% of all members were women (ABS, 1990, 1995b). Thus, while Australian unions remain male dominated, the extent of this domination is decreasing.

---

⁷ This latter survey is biannual, with the most recent figures available being for 1994.
Figure 1: Percentage of Trade Union Members who were Female, Australia, 1982-94

(Source: ABS 1990; 1995b)

The second compositional change has been in the ratio of part-time to full-time members. In 1982, 10% of all union members were part-time employees (ABS, 1990), while in 1994 the figure was 17% (ABS, 1995b). In August 1994 only 23% of part-time workers were union members, compared to 39% of full-timers, suggesting that unions have been rather less successful in recruiting the former than the latter.

Similarly, the proportion of union members who are employed on a casual basis has increased. Data on casual employees was not collected until 1986, when 8% of union members were casual employees (ABS, 1990). By August 1994 the figure had increased to 10% (ABS, 1995b). At that time, only 15% of casual employees were union members compared to 41% of permanent employees.

Thirdly, there has been some change in the occupational distribution of union members as shown in Figure 2. In a general sense the data show a declining proportion of union members employed in “traditional” unionised occupations and an increasing proportion in non-traditional occupations over the period from 1988 (before which data on membership by occupation were not published) to 1994.
For example, in 1988 50% of union members were "Labourers and related workers", "Plant and machine operators, and drivers" or "Tradepersons", while by 1994 these three categories of workers accounted for only 44% of all union members. In 1988, "Professionals" and "Para-professionals" accounted for 22% of members, compared to 26% in 1994. Thus, while the union movement is still composed largely of its traditional occupational constituents, the trend is away from this.

**Location Within the Economy**

Union members in Australia are still to be found predominantly in a relatively narrow range of industries. As of August 1994, Manufacturing accounted for 19% of all union members in Australia, Education for 13% and Health and Community Services for 11% (ABS, 1995b). Nonetheless, a growing proportion of members are employed in the newer service industries relative to those in the traditionally unionised industries. For example, in 1982, one quarter of all trade union members were employed in manufacturing (ABS, 1990). As noted above, by 1994 this had decreased to 19% (ABS, 1995b). In contrast, the respective figures in finance, property and business services were 8% and 9% and in Wholesale and Retail trade 10% and 12% (ABS, 1990, ABS, 1995b).

Secondly, while a somewhat greater proportion of union members is found in the private sector than in the public sector unionisation levels within the latter are much higher than within the former. As of August 1994, 56% of union members were employed in the private sector and the remaining 44% in the public sector (ABS, 1995b). Nonetheless, within the public sector 62% of employees were union members compared to only 26% of private sector employees.
Over the period 1982-94, the relative proportions of union members in the two sectors have remained more or less constant. However, while there has been a decline in membership in both sectors, it has been rather more marked in the public than the private sector. In 1982, there were 1,202,100 public sector union members in Australia, but by 1994 this had decreased to 1,006,100, representing a decrease of 16% on the 1982 figure. In contrast, the respective figures in the private sector were 1,365,500 and 1,277,200, the latter figure representing a decrease of only 7% (ABS, 1990, 1995b).

**Internal Organisation**

The final structural feature to be considered is the internal organisation of unions. Publicly available data which shed light on this issue are particularly scarce. While there are studies of particular unions (for example Davis, 1987) there remains little evidence on which to base conclusions about the internal organisation of Australian unions in general, or particular sorts of unions. Nonetheless, there are a few exceptions.

Ron Callus's (1986) survey explores the employment characteristics of full-time officials in New South Wales unions 8. Callus discusses the growth of a labour market segment within the labour movement, occupied by "salaried experts" (1986: 410) recruited from outside unions. This has grown alongside a traditional internal labour market occupied by organisers and executive officers who tend to be recruited from union members. While observing that the salaried experts tend to be quite different from traditional officials in terms of age, background, educational qualifications and attitudes, Callus argues that the growth of this new category of officials has had little impact on organisational practices and has not interfered with democratic processes.

Bramble (1995) also makes a contribution to this debate, although his conclusions are rather different from Callus's. He uses ABS 1991 census data to examine the employment of salaried experts and argues that this poses a threat to union democracy, largely because such experts tend to be conservative in attitude and distant from the rank and file (Bramble, 1995: 402). While Bramble's data presents a useful snapshot of the characteristics of officials, it tells us little about change in this regard and certainly does not demonstrate directly any change in levels of democratic decision-making within unions. For the purposes of this discussion, the main value of Callus's and Bramble's work is that it highlights the fact that over the last two decades, the internal structures of many unions have indeed undergone significant change. However, the implications of such change remain unclear.

Another source of data on internal organisation is Plowman and Spooner's (1989) survey of NSW unions, which provides one of the few systematic portrayals of the internal organisational structure of contemporary Australian unions. The survey confirms that the principal, full-time administrative position in most unions is that of the secretary, assisted by full-time appointed organisers who accounted for over 60% of all full-time

---

8 Dufty conducted a similar survey in Western Australia, the results of which were published in 1980. Unlike Callus, Dufty surveyed only key office holders, rather than all officials, thereby limiting the utility of the data somewhat.
union staff. In larger unions - with a full-time staff of over 10 - industrial officers may also be employed. Only a small minority of unions - typically white collar or with a very large membership - were found to have research officers. Many of the smaller unions in the survey were reported to be very under-resourced and almost totally dependent on Labor Council advice, assistance and support (Plowman and Spooner, 1989: 114).

A further notable study is the AWIRS, which includes some information about union organisational practices (Callus et al., 1991; see also Benson, 1991). It should be noted, however, that the unit of analysis for the AWIRS is the workplace. Consequently, the data only tell us about how unions organise at a workplace level, rather than about union organisation per se. The items of most relevance to our discussion here concern the role of workplace delegates and the frequency of workplace union meetings.

The AWIRS data show that for Australian unions, workplace-level organisation, via a delegate or delegates, appears to be a fairly common feature. Sixty-six per cent of workplaces (with over 20 employees) had a delegate at the time of the AWIRS (Callus et al., 1991: 103). There were significant variations across industry division and sector. From this we might infer that different unions place different levels of emphasis on workplace level representation, or that conditions in particular categories of workplace are more or less conducive to the presence of delegates, or (more likely) some combination of the two. In 73% of workplaces where a delegate was interviewed, the method of selection was a ballot of union members at the workplace (Callus et al., 1991: 113).

These data are at least suggestive of the fact that Australian unions have a notable workplace level dimension to their organisational structures. This inference is supported by the finding that in 43% of workplaces, union meetings were held at least once a quarter (Callus et al., 1991: 114). These findings call into question frequent claims that industrial relations decentralisation has led to a corresponding centralisation of union organisation and therefore to a lack of shopfloor activism. Nonetheless, they tell us little about the internal organisation of unions and, like much of the preceding discussion, merely highlight our lack of knowledge of key features of unions.

Strategic Dimensions of Unions and Unionism

Ideology, Aims, Objectives and Methods

Union strategy can be understood in terms of the interaction of ideologies, policies, methods and constraints. For Gardner, “a strategy is a plan of action or a method of achieving particular goals” but she argues that this should not be taken to imply that that plan is the result of purposive or deliberate planning exercise (1989: 54). Without reiterating debates concerning the meaning of union strategy and the extent to which it can be the result of choice, determination or deliberate calculation or simply the reaction of decision-makers to circumstances and constraints, strategies can be derived from ideology and union aims, objectives and characteristic methods.
There is no systematic data covering the range of behavioural dimensions that would allow comparison of contemporary Australian union strategies. There is some data on many of the likely elements of union strategy, but the data tend to be partial, regional, dated or not amenable to disaggregation at the level of individual unions.

One of the most comprehensive studies of Australian union decision-making and ideology is based on a survey and detailed study of two of Australia’s largest left wing unions - the Building Workers Industrial Union (BWIU) and the Amalgamated Metals Foundry and Shipwrights Union AMFSU (Frenkel and Coolican, 1984). Amongst other things, the study provides some data on the relative influence of “labourist” and “radical” ideologies within each union and the way in which socialist ideology is mediated by the pressures confronting union leaders (1984: 112-131). The study is based on a range of documentary and statistical data drawn from interviews, surveys and field observation. Other “data” concerning the ideological profiles of Australian unions tend to unsystematic, impressionistic or anecdotal. Commentators regularly assert the ideological position of various unions, although this classification is often complicated by the co-existence of different factions dominating different branches or divisions of the same union. For example in the late 1980s unions such as the Federated Clerks Union (FCU), the Transport Workers Union (TWU) and the Public Service Association (PSU) were all engulfed in conflicts between left and right wing factions fighting for control of various sections of each union (Spooner, 1990: 141).

A more systematic source of data concerning union ideologies and perspectives can be found in the reasonably small number of surveys of the views of union members. Australian surveys of union members tend to report that the majority of unionists see the appropriate focus of union activity as being industrial matters concerning wages and conditions rather than broader social and political issues (see for characteristic examples: Dufty, 1981, Rawson, 1978). These data can only tell us something about what union members believe should be the prime focus for the unions activities, although the data can be used to argue that Australian unions should be “pragmatic” rather than “ideological” (Walker, 1970).

Dufty’s 1977 survey of full-time union officials in Perth is important because of the range of political, attitudinal and ideological variables included in the analysis (Dufty, 1979). Dufty presents data concerning union officials’ attitudes toward the ALP, union -management relations, class and worker participation as well as officials’ perceptions of membership views and attitudes (Dufty, 1979:175-183). The survey provides some interesting data on officials’ attitudes but analyses these in relation to perceived membership attitudes and in relation to the ethnic background of the officials rather than in relation to the characteristics of particular unions or classes of unions.

Some information concerning the predominant concerns or aims of Australian unions can be derived from the data relating to the subject matter of industrial disputes. Deery and Plowman (1991: 265-72) analyse ABS data on industrial disputes providing the proportion of working days lost by specific causes, noting that in the period 1970-89 “wages” disputes
constituted the major cause of almost half of all working days lost. “managerial policy” and then “physical working conditions” were the next two most common causes of lost days. This data can be taken as support for the commonsense proposition that Australian unions are most prepared to go out on strike in pursuit of the traditional and core issues of pay, dismissals, disciplinary procedures and conditions of work. This does not necessarily mean that these are the most important issues for all unions, but simply that they are the issues most likely to give rise to strike action.

Beyond data on industrial action there is relatively little systematic data that has been collected on union methods. One of the very few surveys of union methods was conducted by Niland (1978) who surveyed 75 New South Wales unions as to their relative use of arbitration and collective bargaining. Niland found that 80% of respondent unions used some form of direct negotiation with employers in the settlement of industrial disputes. Only 30% of respondents remained fully within the conciliation and arbitration system while 20% remained totally outside the arbitration system. The more recent survey of NSW unions undertaken by Plowman and Spooner (1989) provides a slightly different picture. When asked which of the different approaches available was the most important for securing benefits for members “industrial action” was the most popular, followed by “resort to industrial tribunal” and “legal action”. Political activity was generally not seen to be as effective with only four unions in the survey identifying it as “very important”. The authors note that three of those four unions operated in sectors subject to significant foreign competition while the fourth had been involved in inter-union rivalries requiring political intervention (Plowman and Spooner, 1989: 115).

While again somewhat tendential to the central issues of ideology, policy and objectives, data concerning the affiliation status of different unions might be thought to provide some information on strategic orientation of unions. Data concerning the ALP affiliation status of state unions and state branches is generally available from state ALP branches or Trades and Labor Councils and has been reported in a number of studies. The Plowman and Spooner (1989) survey reported that over half its union respondents were affiliated with the ALP even though less than 30% of the population of the state’s unions were at that time affiliated. At the national level Rawson and Wrightson’s (1985) survey estimated that approximately 60% of all unionists were in unions affiliated with the ALP.

Virtually all of the unions surveyed by Plowman and Spooner (1989) were affiliated with the NSW Labor Council even though only two-thirds of all the state’s unions were affiliated. Typically, state unions or state branches of federal unions that are affiliated with the state trades and labour council will also be affiliated with the federal ACTU. A list of ACTU affiliates is provided annually by the federal ACTU. Deery and Plowman also provide a recent list of all ACTU affiliates with senior, junior and total membership figures for each affiliated union (1991: 253-257).

Other studies of various aspects of Australian union behaviour can be gleaned for data that shed light on questions of strategy. Typically, however, these studies use either secondary data or survey data that does not permit disaggregation on the basis of individual union characteristics. In other cases
the data simply does not provide information on the role played by union strategies in the phenomena under investigation. For example despite the significant amount of data gathered concerning union membership growth and decline, very little can be said about the possible contribution of particular recruitment or retention strategies pursued by individual unions because the studies remain at the aggregate level (for examples see: Millar and Rummery, 1989; Peetz, 1990; Kenyon and Lewis, 1992). Similarly, there has been significant research energy devoted to the question of the existence and magnitude of a union-wage differential in Australia since the publication of Mulvey (1986). While these studies have confirmed the existence of a union wage advantage, and have estimated its magnitude for different segments of the labour market, very little attention has been paid to which particular union strategies are responsible for securing higher wage outcomes for members (Whitfield and Ross, 1996: 200-02).

Australian research on unions and industrial action and the use and incidence of the closed shop might also be thought to provide some data on union strategy. While studies of strike activity in Australia have investigated the links between aggregate level strike figures and various economic indicators and factors such as unemployment, company profits and the Accord (see for example: Bentley and Hughes, 1970; Perry, 1978; Beggs and Chapman, 1987) there has been little research investigating links between union strategy and strike outcomes. Two partial exceptions are the workplace level studies undertaken by Drago and Wooden (1990) and Dawkins and Wooden (1993). In the former study it was concluded that unionisation level, multi-unionism, multi-award coverage and low employee morale correlate with strike rate. The latter study, using AWIRS data, concluded that while strike proneness increases with workplace size the strike declines again with very large workplaces over 10,000 employees.

Australian studies of the closed shop have used surveys focusing on individual union and employer representatives (Wright, 1983) and workplace level data (Zappala, 1992; Wooden, 1992). Wright found that about half of all Australian unionists worked under some form of closed shop, that the incidence of the arrangement varied across industries and that the majority of agreements were negotiated at the workplace level. While the later studies of Zappala (1992) and Wooden (1992) using the AWIRS data deepen the account of the incidence of closed shop arrangements very little research has been done into the effects of closed shop strategies.
Gaps in Our Knowledge and Additional Data Required

The preceding discussion has allowed us to form a picture of the state of the Australian union movement in the late 1990s, albeit a very partial picture. There are many gaps and limitations inherent in the available data. It is to these gaps and limitations which we now turn, as a means to identify the kinds of data which need to be collected if we are to develop a proper understanding of union structure and strategy in the current environment.

Union Structure

There is a wealth of data concerning structural features of unions and unionism available from the ABS. Nonetheless, the data have some severe limitations from the perspective of this project. Firstly, in the case of Trade Union Members (1990, 1995b), the unit of analysis is the employee. Thus, while we can draw a number of important conclusions concerning the features of union members and therefore of the structural features of the union movement, we cannot say anything about types of unions. Secondly, in the case of Trade Union Statistics, while the unit of analysis is the individual union, only limited data is collected and, probably more importantly, it is not possible to identify individual unions and thereby explore their features.

One of the first attempts to overcome the limitations of the ABS data as a source of information on the basic structure of Australian unions was undertaken by Don Rawson and Suzanne Wrightson at the Australian National University. Rawson and Wrightson put together a series of Handbooks of Australian Trade Unions and Employee Associations from 1970 to 1985 (1970; 1973; 1978; 1980; 1985) with the fifth edition entitled Australian Unions 1984. The handbooks provided basic information showing the membership figures of all Australian trade unions listed by name in alphabetical order. Unfortunately, the most recent edition of the handbook is now over ten years old, rendering it of limited use in terms of describing and analysing contemporary patterns of union structure.

The additional studies considered (Callus, 1986; Bramble, 1995; Plowman and Spooner, 1989; and Callus et al., 1991) provide some additional detail concerning specific aspects of union structure. None, however, is comprehensive.

These characteristics of the data mean that we can draw only very limited conclusions about size, coverage and density, membership composition and location, and none at all about internal organisation and position with respect to other unions. These limitations can be overcome to a very limited extent by supplementing the ABS data with the additional sources discussed in the previous section.

Thus, the available data sources allow us to make sense, at least partially, of key structural characteristics of the Australian trade union movement, but to say very little about the structural characteristics of trade unions per se. It is clear that additional data would be required to make sense of structural characteristics of unions, and to explore relationships between structure and
strategy. Specifically, there is a need for detailed data, collected using the individual union as the unit of analysis, which allows us to explore the relationships between different structural dimensions of unions.

Union Strategy

There is relatively little systematic, comprehensive Australian data concerning union strategy that has been gathered at the level of the union itself. Most of the available data remains at a relatively aggregated level. First, as noted above, the ABS data concentrates on basic structural data with no reference to data concerning ideology, policies, aims, objectives or methods. Second, the studies and surveys that have addressed questions of ideology, aims, methods and strategies have rarely taken the union as the unit of analysis. There is some tradition of collecting and analysing data concerning the attitudes of union members (and, indeed, non-members) using, for example the Australian Electoral Survey (Deery and De Cieri, 1991), or specially commissioned surveys of unionists such as the 1976 Trade Unionist Study (Rawson, 1980: 159-161) and the Western Australian trade unionist survey (Dufty, 1981). These studies have generally focused on the attitudes and characteristics of members and potential members without providing data concerning the union or type of union to which they belong or could join. The extent to which these data can be used to say anything about the strategies pursued by particular unions (or types of unions) is therefore limited. Third, the surveys that do take the union as the unit of analysis (Niland, 1978; Dufty, 1979; Plowman and Spooner, 1989) tend to suffer from limitations in terms of a paucity of items concerning strategic issues, the limited regional focus of the sampling frame or the age of the data.

The data that is needed must be gathered at the level of the individual union and must be national in focus. Such a survey project would need to collect data on both the structural characteristics of the union, its membership and its functions and the major policies, approaches, objectives, methods and strategic constraints and opportunities of the union. While some of that data could be gathered from secondary data sources including the ABS surveys reviewed above, the information held by the federal ACTU and the state trades and labour councils, and the structural data held by the Australian and state industrial registries, most data on strategies and strategic perceptions and evaluations would require a specialist survey of union managers, in most cases, Secretaries or Assistant Secretaries. Only then could detailed data concerning union structure be analysed alongside data regarding the aims, objectives and strategies pursued by union decision-makers.

The Relationship Between Structure and Strategy

We have argued that there are major gaps and limitations in the data concerning union structure and strategy, which constrain our capacity to explore relationships between these factors and their relationships with environmental forces. This does not mean, however, that we are unable to draw any meaningful conclusions about the relationship between structure and strategy in a changing environment. In the discussion which follows, we consider what we do know, based on the work of other authors, and seek to
draw out some key points about the nature of union structure and strategy, as a precursor to mapping out our new classification system in Part 4.

A number of authors have proposed models of union strategy as interacting with structure and environment, most notably Clegg (1976), Frenkel and Coolican (1984) and Gardner (1989). Clegg’s model proposed union behaviour as the result of bargaining structures which in turn were seen to be the result of management approaches. Gardner saw union strategy as constituted by internal factors including membership composition, the structure of union government and leadership ideology (1989:67) constrained by external factors including political, market and management forces (1989:65). Frenkel and Coolican model union behaviour as the result of six key forces: external union structure, the role of the state, economic and industrial structure, characteristics of employers and managers, workers’ orientations and organisation and leadership ideology (Frenkel and Coolican, 1984: 6-9).

Frenkel and Coolican’s conception of ideology is virtually indistinguishable from strategy. For them, ideology is defined as a conception of unionism and is labelled as either labourism or radicalism. (Interestingly, leadership ideology was not ultimately very important in their explanation of union behaviour). While their study of two unions offers no strong evidence on the incidence of each ideological predisposition across Australian unionism, it is their general claim that labourism is the dominant perspective and radicalism the more marginal perspective amongst Australian union leaders.

In the analysis of strategic change across Australian unionism, labourism emerges as a sensible place to start. Labourism was classically defined by Hagan in terms of the principles of “White Australia, Tariff Protection, compulsory arbitration, strong unions and the Labor Party” (Hagan, 1981: 14). Most of these principles of classical labourism are either dead and buried (WAP), dying (arbitration), or under serious threat (strong unions) and certainly the modern Labor Party is in many relevant respects rather different from what it was at the time of Hagan’s definition. Furthermore, as the previous sections make plain, many of the environmental, policy, institutional, organisational and compositional conditions that have traditionally been thought to sustain labourism have been eroded or are under threat - including dominant levels of male, blue collar, full time employment, the exclusive role of the industrial tribunals, national wage cases and comparative wage justice.

A number of commentators have argued that the early part of the Accord era marked a decisive shift from labourism to corporatism (Dow, 1988; Higgins, 1987) while others have stressed the continuities with labourism despite some changes (Singleton, 1990). Certainly, the shift to corporatism, strategic unionism and political unionism in Australia during the 1980s was very partial and incomplete (Boreham, 1990). The impetus in that direction had stalled by 1987. Tripartism, and the early Accords themselves, were characteristic of new forms of interest intermediation involving the ACTU rather than all or most individual unions. Australia had some limited elements of macro-corporatism (EPAC, the early Accords) and meso-corporatism (in manufacturing) but very little micro-corporatism. Forms of
corporatist bargaining, concertation and policy implementation remained generally at a supra-union level.

This is not to say that labourism has survived unaffected. The heart of labourism has been a reliance on regular minimum wage increases to fairly precisely defined occupational grades as the principal means of workers, their families and dependants securing the means of their subsistence through purchasing socially important goods and services as commodities on private markets. As a corollary of this, the focus of union campaigns has traditionally been economicist: a concentration on wage increases and the defence of existing protections and conditions of work.

A number of the forces of change detailed above resulted in a broadening of this economicist strategic focus: the partial and temporary integration of industrial concerns with a program of social policy reform in the first Accord amounted to elements of political unionism; changing government priorities and employer approaches emphasised workplace productivity issues; the increasing proportion of women, part-time, casual and service and public sector workers in unions provided support for broader negotiations. The broadening focus of union campaigns can be seen in the Termination Change and Redundancy Case and associated campaign, the pursuit of superannuation, the greater recognition of rights and claims of part-time workers, elements of the award restructuring process and some of the productivity bargaining that went on under the second tier negotiations. Wages remain the central focus for Australian unions but the scope of bargaining and the range of matters that were placed on the industrial agendas of most unions broadened significantly during the period.

More recent changes suggests that this broadening of union strategic goals may now be on the wane. Enterprise bargaining has not, of course, led to the dramatic broadening and deepening of negotiation that some imagined. Rather it has been used by employers as the latest device in the execution of cost-minimisation strategies (Boreham, Hall and Harley, 1996). The stronger decentralising focus of the Coalition's policy trajectory will intensify these trends. In our estimation, decentralisation of industrial relations then, is likely to be the strongest structural change affecting union strategy in the short and medium terms.

While the amalgamation process has been a significant element of change that is likely to have affected union strategy its immediate future is now in doubt. It has been suggested by some that the amalgamations process has probably promoted as much membership poaching, aggressive union rivalry and internecine conflict as it has greater cooperation, coordination and efficiency in the use of resources and expertise (Dabscheck, 1995: 131-6). Proposed legislative changes allowing amalgamated unions to separate will not ease these tensions but may only serve to extend the conditions of uncertainty and conflict while providing further impetus to the decentralising drive.

We argue that there are likely to be two sets of effects that will impact on union strategy associated with these decentralising trends. First, unions, where they can, will be tempted to return to a more blatant and aggressive economism pursuing short term wage increases for their core (and
traditional) membership. This would amount to a return to a militant
economism rather than a return to labourism, though. The second related set
of effects will involve the greater concentration on workplace level
organisation and mobilisation. The greater autonomy afforded workplace
bargaining will probably encourage sectionalism and disaggregation to the
extent that it is driven by employers. Nevertheless, these trends are far from
inevitable.

The second major change to the structure of Australian trade unionism that
is affecting strategic orientations is membership decline. While union
membership decline is not always and everywhere fatal to union strategy
and labour movement success, there are two factors which suggest that the
situation for Australian unions is now critical. First while the comparative
data indicate that extension arrangements typically buttress union power
even where membership rates are relatively modest (as in for example in
Germany, the Netherlands, and Portugal), the efficacy of Australia’s
distinctive method of extension is presently under threat of elimination.
Even if the award system and its flow-on effects are to remain, its
effectiveness in establishing a serious benchmark set of comprehensive
wages and conditions is likely to deteriorate dramatically. Second, it is
possible that Australia’s overall level of union density of less than 35% is
now below a “critical mass” point at which the union movement can be
automatically regarded as an authoritative and representative voice across
the economy.

PART FOUR: TOWARDS A NEW CLASSIFICATORY
SYSTEM

Having dealt now with traditional approaches to classification, with key
environmental changes and with data concerning the changing nature of the
trade union movement, the final task for this paper is to seek to produce a
classificatory system based on the preceding discussion.

As argued in Part 3, while available structural data concerning individual
unions remains limited, comprehensive and comparable data pertaining to
strategy is almost non-existent. It may be possible here to offer some
observations concerning the applicability of various structural typologies to
the current shape of the Australian union movement, however it is virtually
impossible to develop or refine a strategic typology (or a typology that
includes strategic variables) given the paucity of the data. A possible model
for a strategic typology is, however, suggested in the final section of this
part where different strategic options for Australian unions are briefly
canvassed. First, the need for a new structurally based typology is
considered. However, the possibility of applying a more sophisticated
typology that integrates both structural and strategic features must await the
collection of appropriate data.
A New Structurally-based Typology?

Despite capturing the attention of many Australian industrial relations researchers and commentators typologies or classificatory systems have rarely been systematically applied to Australian unions. Given that even the simple compilation of a reasonably accurate list of the names of Australian unions has in itself been a significant research task (Rawson and Wrightson, 1970, 1980, 1985; Rawson, 1973, 1977) it is hardly surprising that the categorisation of unions, even according to relatively simple structural characteristics, has proved so difficult.

Following their 1981 survey of NSW unions Plowman and Spooner (1989) concluded that very few unions actually fitted the traditional craft/industry/general/house typology and that “most unions surveyed could best be described as ‘occupational unions’” (Plowman and Spooner, 1989:105).

Deery and Plowman rather bravely proclaim that although their typology of craft/occupational/industrial/general unions is “overly simple”, it nevertheless provides “a means of distinguishing the broad organisational features of unions” (1991: 239). No example of a craft union is provided with the authors suggesting that many earlier craft unions became occupational unions through their recruitment of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Deery and Plowman recognise a number of different types of occupational unions: narrow occupational unions like the Australian Foremen Stevedore’s Association (now amalgamated to become the Maritime Union of Australia) that organise a particular occupational classification only; occupational unions that organise closely related occupations such as the Printing and Kindred Industries Union (now the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union); and, those occupational unions that organise all occupations across a number of industries such as the Federated Clerks Union (now the Australian Services Union). While Deery and Plowman argue that as of 1991 there was “no true industrial union in Australia” they did nominate the Australian Bank Employees’ Union (now the Finance Sector Union), the Australasian Meat Industry Employees’ Union and the Vehicle Builders’ Employees Federation (now the Automotive, Food, Metals and Engineering Union) as close to industrial unions. The Australian Workers Union and the Federated Miscellaneous Workers’ Union (as they then were) were identified as cases of general unions.

Of the other structural typologies surveyed in Part 1, that based on the predominant collar colour of the membership emerges as one of the few able to usefully discriminate amongst unions on the basis of available data. Most large unions maintain dual registration through one device or another, and virtually all are affiliated to state trades and labor councils and the ACTU. Reliable data concerning ALP affiliation status of all state branches is not readily available and there is little data on which to distinguish amongst professional, participative and managerial unions (Heery and Kelly, 1994), bureaucratic and participative unions (Davis, 1987) or workplace absent, inactive or active (Littler, Quinlan and Kitay, 1989).
As indicated by the amalgamations and name changes noted above, the structure of Australian unions has changed dramatically since Deery and Plowman’s last attempt to grapple with the application of their own typology. From all the above examples used above only the Australasian Meat Industry Employees’ Union remains intact six years later. To what extent does the course of amalgamations suggest a new structural typology?

One effect of the amalgamations process has been to sweep a number of smaller craft, semi-occupational or occupational unions together with existing big unions to form super-unions that give the initial appearance of being industry unions. For example, in 1991 the Mannequins and Models Guild of Australia and the Australian Hairdressers, Wigmakers and Hairworkers Employees Federation were amalgamated into the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association. This suggests a number of changes to the traditional structural typology favoured by Deery and Plowman. First, the craft category could be dropped leaving occupational/industry/ general unions. Second, the problem of distinguishing between multi-occupational and single-occupational unions remains. Should multi-occupational unions be re-classified as industry unions or general unions or regarded as a different category? Third, are the super-unions formed as a result of the amalgamations process to be considered industry unions, general unions or multi-industry unions? Alternatively, should these super-unions be treated as coherent individual unions in name only? Perhaps they should be regarded as confederations of distinct, autonomous union divisions or branches?

While it is not possible to attempt a characterisation of each Australian union in order to clarify these questions the character of the largest Australian unions can be considered as a means of moving toward a new typology. First, each of the eleven unions currently with a membership of over 100,000 can be considered in turn:

**Australian Education Union (AEU).** Dominant Occupational Union. The AEU is the largest of four unions (alongside the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), the Independent Education Union of Australia (IEU) and the Independent Schools Staff Association (ISSA) ACT) in the education industry and cannot therefore claim to represent the industry. It is however the dominant union for school teachers with a membership of almost 160,000 compared with the 42,000 members in the IEU and the 765 members in the ISSA ACT (ACTU, 1996: 42-3). The union is overwhelmingly white collar.

**Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU).** Dominant Industry Union. The AMWU is the dominant union representing the metals manufacturing industry (along with the AWU) and the sole union within the food processing industry. In addition to organising metals, motor vehicle assembly and food processing workers the union now also organises workers in the printing industry. Its membership is strongly blue-collar.

**Australian Services Union (ASU).** Dominant Occupational Union. The ASU is the dominant union representing clerical and administrative workers in the private sector and in local government. Its status as a sole occupational union is complicated by the fact that the CPSU organises
administrative officers and clerical workers in Commonwealth and State
government departments and statutory authorities. The membership is
overwhelmingly white-collar.

**Australian Workers Union (AWU).** Dominant Industry Union/ General
Union. The AWU is the dominant industry union for the rural industry and
is a significant union in the metals manufacturing industry (following the
amalgamation with the Federation of Industrial Manufacturing and
Engineering Employees in 1993). Because the rural industry is so diverse
and because the present AWU, like its predecessor of the same name formed
in 1905, organises such a range of occupations and trades, the union has a
strong claim to being a general union. The union is predominantly blue-
collar.

**Communications, Electrical, Electronic, Energy, Information, Postal,
Plumbing and Allied Services Union of Australia (CEPU).** Dominant
Industry Union. The CEPU is the dominant industry union for two
industries: the communications and electrical industries. This is reflected in
the structuring of the union into a communications division and an electrical
division. The union is also the dominant organisation for plumbers. The
union organises both blue-collar and white-collar workers.

**Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU).** Dominant
Industry Union. The CFMEU is a genuine super-union enjoying dominant
status within three major industries: building and construction, mining and
timber. The only other remaining federally registered union in the building
and construction industry is the Victorian State Building Trades Union. The
Current CFMEU is based on the old BWIU, the Australian Timber and
Allied Industries Union and the United Mineworkers Federation and
absorbed the Furnishing Trade Union and the Operative Painters and
Decorators in 1993. The CFMEU is a blue-collar union.

**Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU).** Dominant Industry Union.
The CPSU is the sole federal public sector union and, following the
unofficial absorption of the State Public Services Federation in 1994 (Jadeja,
1994:51) also organises some state public sector workers. The federal union
is currently structured by a Public Sector Union group and a State Public
Services Federation Group. The CPSU is a white collar union.

**Finance Sector Union of Australia (FSU).** Dominant Industry Union. The
FSU is the dominant union for the banking, insurance and finance industry
combining the Australian Bank Employees Union, the Australian Insurance
Employees Union and the Commonwealth Bank Officers Association with
various smaller house and occupational unions. The FSU is a white collar
union.

**Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union. (LHMU).**
Dominant Industry Union/ General Union. The LHMU is an amalgam of the
major hospitality unions (the Federated Liquor and Allied Trades
Employees Union and the Pastrycooks, Bakers, Biscuitmakers and Allied
Trades Union) and the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union (FMWU).
Each state branch of the union is divided into liquor and hospitality
divisions and miscellaneous workers divisions reflecting this heritage.
Given this persistence and the fact that the FMWU was a good example of a general union in Australia the LHMU is classified as part dominant industry union and part general union. The union organises both white and blue collar workers.

**National Union of Workers. (NUW).** Dominant Industry Union. The NUW, based on the old Federated Storemen and Packers Union, combines most of the unions organising workers in wholesale sales, cold storage, warehousing and distribution. The NUW is not the exclusive union in the transport and storage industries however with separate unions organising workers in retail trade, public transport, private transport and in the maritime and stevedoring industries. Nevertheless the NUW can be classified as dominant in the wholesale trade and storage industries. The NUW organises both white and blue collar workers.

**Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA).** Dominant Industry Union. The SDA is the dominant union in the retail sales industry organising sales assistants and associated workers. The SDA is a white collar union.

Most of the super-unions in this group of Australia’s major unions have therefore an industry character. Most are not the sole union for a particular industry but are very dominant across one or sometimes more than one industry. Smaller, but still important unions tend to have either a clearer occupational quality or are a secondary industry union. The following federal ACTU affiliated unions of over 10,000 members can be characterised as follows:

**Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers, Australia (APESMA).** Multi-occupational Union.

**Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU).** Occupational Union.

**Australian Nursing Federation. (ANF).** Occupational Union.

**Health Services Union of Australia (HSUA).** Secondary Industry Union.

**Independent Education Union (IEU).** Secondary Occupational Union.

**Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA).** Dominant Industry Union.

**National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU).** Secondary Occupational Union.

**New South Wales Nurses Association (NSWNA).** Secondary Occupational Union.

**Public Transport Union (PTU).** Secondary Industry Union.

**Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union (TCFUA).** Dominant Industry Union.
Transport Workers Union (TWU). Dominant Industry Union.

United Firefighters Union of Australia (UFUA). Dominant Occupational Union.

On the surface at least the amalgamations of the late 1980s and early 1990s have changed the predominant character of Australia’s biggest unions from an occupational basis to an industry basis. The usefulness of the “industry union” category depends of course on how “industry is defined”. Secondly, a number of the largest super-unions organise across two or more industries and may be better regarded as distinct industry unions. For example the CFMEU as an actor and organisation may better be classified as three industry unions: a building and construction union, a timber union and a mining union. This overview of the larger unions suggests a revised structural typology that draws on the strengths of previous typologies and attempts to accommodate the new structure of Australian unions.

Where reasonably distinct, functionally autonomous branches or divisions exist within a union then those divisions or branches should be considered to constitute unions. The primary categorisation of industry/occupational/general could be applied and qualified in two ways:

Is the union or division dominant or secondary within the industry or occupation?;

Is the union multi-industry or single-industry, multi-occupational or single-occupational.

A New Strategically-based Typology?

As argued above in the absence of satisfactory data concerning the strategic orientations of individual unions the value of a strategically-based typology cannot effectively be tested. The imperative of gathering data concerning both the structure and strategic orientation of all Australian unions is discussed in the conclusion to this Part. While a new strategic typology that integrates what we know about present structures must await the collection of that data, it is possible to propose alternative strategic orientations on the basis of our understanding of Australian union strategy and our analysis of the changing environment of Australian unionism (Part 2).

In Part 2 we argued that Australian unions generally confront two fundamental challenges: industrial relations decentralisation and membership decline. What strategic approaches are Australian unions likely to choose from in confronting those challenges? We consider three possible, and to some extent alternative, strategic scenarios.
Militant-Economic Unionism

This is a very likely scenario according to our analysis. The decentralisation tendencies of the current industrial relations climate and the possible reversal of the amalgamations process under the Coalition Government make an aggressive sectionalism quite attractive to the short term goals of relatively powerful unions. This strategy will do nothing to arrest union membership decline (because of its lack of appeal to the growing and marginal sectors of the labour market) and will harden employer resolve to baut unions where possible. The resurgent public perceptions of union self-interest, aggression and power will further erode union sympathetic attitudes. Some commentators have argued that a resurgent, militant workplace activism is central to the rejuvenation of the Australian union movement. We believe that this type of renewal will benefit only a minority of very well organised workers and will succeed only in deepening divisions and sectionalist tendencies across unions.

Managerialist-Service Unionism

Calls for unions to adopt a more explicitly service orientation to their increasingly diverse and supposedly ‘consumer-oriented’ membership have increased as membership decline has become more dramatic. Strategies advocated under this general model include increasing the range of non-industrial, non-traditional services available to members (Evatt Foundation, 1995: 68-69), surveying members to determine the specific needs of various membership groups and providing specialist services and officers to cater accordingly (e.g.: Heery and Kelly’s managerial unionism (1994)), engaging in competition with other unions for disaffected members (Costa, 1992), and targeting particular groups of potential members with tailored campaigns (Ellem, 1992). While these service-oriented strategies offer a response to the membership crisis facing unions we question both their longer term effectiveness, and the rationale on which they are based. First, if members join unions for services it is likely that they will leave unions for superior services offered elsewhere and this consumer loyalty is unlikely to last very long in competitive markets. Second, the evidence reviewed above suggests that people join and stay in unions because they are sympathetic to unionism generally and because they benefit through the industrial protections afforded by union membership. There also appears to be little in a managerialist-service model of unionism that will necessarily strengthen workplace structures.

Articulated-Institutional Unionism

Given the relative failure of the Accord process after 1987 there has been little attention paid to the continuing possibilities of political unionism. However the union movement faces challenges at the national political, industry, enterprise and workplace levels. The models of strategic unionism proposed by the ACTU/TDC (1987), Burgess and MacDonald (1990), Bray and Walsh (1993) and Ewer et al., (1991) remain compelling in their capacity to respond to several of the dimensions of contemporary change at a number of levels. While the advocacy of centrally coordinated policies, tripartism and close relations with the Labor Party are the easily recalled
legacies of the ACTU’s last flirtation with strategic unionism, an articulated-institutional unionism can also include the promotion of broad negotiating agendas which can appeal to the industrial concerns of a broader membership, the promotion of regional and industry level structures for joint consultation between employers, and unions, and the active encouragement of workplace structures. A renewed version of the strategic unionism originally proposed by the ACTU might be involve an articulated-institutional approach that sought to establish institutions at the micro-, meso- as well as macro- levels with capital rather than the state.

CONCLUSION

Australian trade unions have confronted enormous challenges in recent years. The policy and regulatory environment under both Labor and Coalition Governments at both state and federal level has challenged traditional assumptions about the role of unions and the methods they can use. Employers have increasingly sought to exploit the changed environment through a variety of soft and hard strategies that have sought to either weaken unions directly or dilute their importance and relevance indirectly. Thirdly, the changing industrial and labour market profile of the Australian economy has attacked the organisational foundations of many of the country’s strongest and most established unions.

In response to these challenges the structures and strategies of Australian unionism have changed also. Unions everywhere have been trying to cope with the fallout from amalgamations, with the renewed emphasis on the workplace level in industrial relations and with the imperative to recruit and retain members. All of this suggests that our traditional understanding of the structural and strategic diversity of the Australian trade union movement should be critically reconsidered. Can our traditional attempts to classify Australian unions, for example, cope with the new realities?

The central argument of this paper is that the development of a compelling new typology of Australian unionism that can integrate both the key structural qualities of unions as organisations with the strategic characteristics of unions as actors requires the collection and analysis of new data. While in Part 4 we have proposed a revised structural typology of Australian unionism the rigorous testing of such a typology requires more systematic and comprehensive data than is currently available. More importantly the development of a strategically-based typology that integrates structural characteristics requires the collection of survey based union level data on strategic goals, perspectives and constraints. Only then can our formative hypotheses as to the capacity of different sorts of unions to respond to different sorts of challenges be satisfactorily tested.
REFERENCES


Flanders, A. 1965. *Industrial Relations: What is Wrong with the System?*, London: Faber and Faber.


APPENDIX A: KEY DATA SOURCES ON THE AUSTRALIAN UNION MOVEMENT

Our aims in attempting to identify available data were threefold. Firstly, we sought to locate data which might potentially enable us to elucidate some of the issues concerning union organisation, structure and mobilisation which were discussed in the paper. Secondly, we aimed to collate a comprehensive list of data which would be of use to other researchers working in the area of union organisation. Finally, by locating and examining the available data we sought to identify gaps as a means to inform future data collection.

We placed a number of limitations on our search. Firstly, we restricted ourselves to publicly available data sources. There may well be data held by universities, unions or freelance researchers, of which we are not aware. Secondly, our emphasis was on quantitative data, and especially such data which were amenable to computer-based analysis. Thirdly, our searches were all conducted prior to 31 December 1996 and unless otherwise stated, nothing reported here is more recent than this. Fourthly, our concern was with data which were relevant to our interest in the construction of a union classification system which was based on structure and/or strategy, rather than with "the union movement" per se. Therefore, the data sources listed and discussed are restricted to those which we have identified as being relevant to the narrow aims of this project.

We make no claim that our audit of the data is exhaustive. Rather, it provides what we believe to be a comprehensive, and hopefully useful, listing of publicly available data, of particular relevance to research on trade union structures and organisation in Australia, current as of late 1996.

The data sources which we identified can be divided into four general categories, each of which is discussed briefly below. A detailed annotated listing of the data sources identified follows.

By far the richest source of data is the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The ABS conducts a number of surveys of individuals and unions which gather data relevant to this project. Two publications stand out as particularly useful. Trade Union Members, Australia is produced every second year (since 1976), based on data gathered in a survey which supplements the ABS Labour Force Survey, and provides considerable information concerning the social and demographic characteristics of members and non-members. Trade Union Statistics is produced annually (since 1969) and is based on data collected from individual unions. It provides data on the characteristics of the respondent unions and their members. A number of other ABS publications utilise data drawn from these two surveys. A third publication relevant to the study of union strategy is Industrial Disputes, Australia, which includes a number of items on the activities of unions in the course of disputes.

The second category of data identified comprised various "one-off" published surveys. Perhaps the most noteworthy example is the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS), conducted in 1989-90 by
the Commonwealth Department of Industrial Relations (DIR). Selected data analysis was published as *Industrial Relations at Work: The Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey* (Callus et al., 1991) and the raw data are available to researchers on computer disk. The AWIRS involved interviews with very large samples of managers and union delegates and provides information on a number of aspects of union organisation and activity. Two other relevant examples are *The BCAN/ILS Industrial Relations Study: An Overview of the Employee Survey* (Drago et al., 1988) and *Enterprise-Based Bargaining Units: A Better Way of Working, Vol. 1* (BCA, 1989). We found the two BCA-related surveys of little assistance for this project, but they are included here on the basis that there are so few survey-based sources of data on unions available.

Thirdly, there are various publications available which gather together data from a range of sources in an attempt to provide students and researchers with easily accessible information on union structures and membership. Two notable, although now rather out of date, examples are Plowman (1981) and Rawson and Wrightson (1980; 1985). A particularly useful recent guide is *Parties to the Award* (Jadeja, 1994), which is a guide to the “pedigrees” and archival resources of federally registered unions and provides a means to trace structural change in unionism over the last 90 years as well as identifying additional sources of data.

Finally, useful data can be obtained from a number of indexes and directories. Most notable are the *Industrial Relations Index: A Guide to Unions, Employer Groups and the Industrial Relations Industry* (Information Australia, 1985-), the annual ACTU *National Union Diary and Directory* (ACTU) and the annual handbooks produced by each of the state and territory trades and labour councils (or their functional equivalents). These guides provide a range of information concerning union membership, amalgamations and affiliation, as well as names and contact details for officials.

**A Select and Annotated Listing of Relevant Data Sources**

**Survey-Based Data**

*ABS Trade Union Members, Australia, Catalogue No. 6325.0, Two-Yearly; first issue: 1976; latest issue: 1992*. [6325.0.40.001; 1994].

Provides details of social and demographic characteristics of union members and non-members. Characteristics of labour force participation are also provided. Other items include State and Territory of usual residence, industry, occupation, full-time/part-time status, permanent or casual work.

---

9 As well as the ABS sources listed below, there are various other ABS publications which include data on unions. These were not included in our listing on the basis that they simply repackage and/or summarise data drawn from the listed sources.

10 More recent data are available for this, and some other ABS services, as “Standard Data Services”. These services have the same titles as the corresponding publications, but are identified by Product Numbers rather than Catalogue Numbers. Where applicable, the product number and year of most recent release appear in square brackets after the details of the publication in this appendix. The data reported in earlier parts of this paper are drawn from either source, depending on which is most recent.

---

Page 46
employee, sector, weekly earnings in main job and size of location. The results of this publication are from a supplementary survey run in association with the August 1992 labour force survey conducted throughout Australia. Unpublished data ("Special Data Services") is also available for this survey.

ABS Trade Union Statistics, Australia, Catalogue No. 6323.0; Annual; first issue: 1969; latest issue 1996. [6323.0.40.001; 1995].

Covers the number of separate trade unions and their size; financial and total members classified by State, Territory and sex; proportion of employed wage and salary earners who were members of unions. The number of unions and number of members are also classified according to the size of the union. The results of this publication are from questionnaires completed by individual trade unions, "reporting unions". Accordingly, persons who are members of more than one trade union are counted more than once. Some unpublished data is available from this survey.

ABS Working Arrangements, Australia, Catalogue No. 6342.0, New Issue; Irregular; first and latest issue: 1993. [6342.0.40.001; 1996].

Provides information on characteristics of working arrangements of employed persons, including the flexibility of working arrangements and shift work. Among the topics covered are full-time/part-time status, industry, occupation, hours worked, flex time, rostered days off, overtime, absences from work, types of leave used, weekly earnings and availability of child care. Data on trade union membership and labour characteristics is provided. The data are from a supplementary survey run in association with the Labour Force Survey conducted throughout Australia. Unpublished data is also available for this survey. The unpublished data here has more to offer than Trade Union Members (6325.0), as up to seven population types can be included in cross-tabulations.

ABS Industrial Disputes, Australia, Catalogue No. 6321.0; Monthly; first issue: 1970.

See below.

ABS Industrial Disputes, Australia, Catalogue No. 6322.0; Annual; first issue: 1982-3; latest issue: 1996. [6322.0.40.001; 1995].

Number of disputes, employees involved, working days lost and working days lost per thousand employees in industrial disputes involving stoppages of work of ten working days or more classified by State, industry, duration of disputes, cause and method of settlement. Causes of disputes include: Trade Unionism - disputes concerning employment of non-unionists, inter-union and intra-union disputes; sympathy stoppages in support of employees in another industry; recognition of union activities.


Covers the statistical frameworks, concepts, sources and collection methodology of ABS labour statistics including: the labour force, earnings
and award wages, labour costs, employer training expenditure and industrial disputes. It also discusses how Australia's statistics relate to major ILO conventions and examines differences between similar statistical series measured by different ABS labour surveys.


This covers findings from a number of surveys conducted for the Business Council of Australia. Of most relevance is Chapter 3 - 3.2 Number, Pattern and Structure of Trade Unions. The data is from employer surveys.


AWIRS involved interviews with more than 4500 managers and employee representatives at workplaces across Australia employing five or more employees. Within the range of information collected, data on union organisation and function is available. See especially pp.48-53 and pp.101-122, for data on trade unions.


This paper is based on some of the results of a study undertaken by the Business Council of Australia. The paper analyses findings from a survey of 854 employees at 15 locations around Australia, the US, New Zealand, Canada and Austria.

**Directories and Indexes**

Australian Council of Trade Unions *The National Union Directory and Diary*, Melbourne: ACTU, Annual.\(^{11}\)

This directory provides a list of ACTU affiliated trade unions. The information given is limited largely to contact names and telephone numbers. Some membership details are provided.


Includes a list of most trade unions in Australia, noting their address, officers, membership and industrial affiliation, together with details on their major branches.

---

\(^{11}\) State Trades and Labour Councils/ ACTU Branches also publish similar directories, although they tend to be less detailed.

This recently completed publication is a comprehensive listing of all Federally registered trade unions in Australia. As well as a general listing, the author provides detailed “pedigrees” of unions, showing their amalgamation histories.

**Collations of Statistics**


This booklet attempts to synthesise into one source the trade union data most useful to students and researchers. Statistical sources are information obtained directly from trade unions and state and national peak councils, industrial registries which form a part of the federal and state conciliation and arbitration tribunal system, Rawson and Wrightson’s Handbook (see below) and the ABS.


This appendix provides a listing, rather similar to this one, of the various sources of data on Australian unions, and discusses their limitations. In addition it includes a series of summary tables of data from the sources listed.


This series lists all trade unions known to exist in Australia, membership of unions, their registration under state and federal jurisdictions, and their affiliation with the ACTU and its state branches and with the Australian
Labor Party. Sources of information are from the unions concerned, from reports of Industrial Registrars, the Executive Report of the ACTU and "other sources".


This book is the successor to four editions of *A Handbook of Australian Trade Unions and Employees' Associations*. It updates information from this series (see above).


A listing of literature on Australian trade unions up to the first half of 1982, arranged around a series of topics.
APPENDIX B: A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS

Arthurs, A. 1983. 'Managerial Trade Unionism' The Journal of Industrial Relations 25(2) June: 140-152.


Economic Restructuring and Industrial Relations in Australia and New Zealand: A Comparative Analysis ACIRRT Monograph No.8 Sydney: ACIRRT, University of Sydney.


Castles, F. 1988. 'Realism and reality: Australia’s trade union movement seeks a new policy strategy' The Australian Quarterly 60(3) Spring: 308-316.


Monagle, T. 1993. 'The way ahead' Eureka Street 3(3) April: 14-16.

Muller-Jentsch, W. 1985. 'Trade Unions as Intermediary Organisations' Economic and Industrial Democracy 6, 3-33.


