

The Influence Of The Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union (AMWU) On The New Zealand Engineers' Union (NZEU) With Respect To The Education And Training Reforms Between 1987 And 1992

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In the 1980s the AMWU influenced the NZEU with respect to education and training. The purpose of this study was to investigate the specific details of this relationship. It involved an extensive review of government policy documents and union literature. The study also involved twenty-three interviews in Australia and New Zealand. The findings confirmed and enhanced the previous observations about the influence of the AMWU. Not only did they identify in more depth the nature of the trans-Tasman influence; they also identified important similarities and differences between the contexts in which the two unions were operating. Specifically, the study found that whereas the AMWU had a long history and could be identified as pro-active; the NZEU came to education and training reform in response to labour market deregulation.

Introduction and purpose

Since the late 1980s, the argument that education and training is the key to improving a country's economic performance has been popularised throughout the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This resurgence of Human Capital Theory (HCT) has been endorsed by governments, business, unionists and educationalists (Marginson, 1993; 1997). Underpinning this complex debate about the role of the state was the ascent of neo-liberal ideas. Australia and New Zealand were no exception to these international trends. In the 1980s the Labour Governments of both countries began to institute a process of education and training reform that struggled to reconcile their traditional commitment to social democratic principles and aspirations with the growing influence of neo-liberalism (Beilharz, 1994; Law, 1996).

This study had two closely related purposes: (1) it sought to identify and explore the nature of the influence of the AMWU on the education and training policies and practices of its counterpart, the NZEU¹ (Perry, Hill & Davidson, 1995; Law, 1994; 1996); and (2) it aimed to begin to develop a better understanding of evolving trans-Tasman union relationships.

This study presents five sets of themes that emerge from the literature review and the findings: (1) that a semi-sequential, interrelated set of domestic and international considerations shaped the ways in which the two countries' union movements approached education and training reform in the late 1980s; (2) that notwithstanding the neo-liberal tide, the Australian union movement, in particular the AMWU, adopted and drove a pro-active strategy for change; (3) that while the New Zealand union movement's strategy moved in the same direction as its Australian counterpart, that strategy was much less developed; (4) that the New Zealand union movement's strategy was heavily reliant on Australian ideas and influences; and (5) that the AMWU influence on the NZEU evidences a growth in trans-Tasman, inter-union co-operation.

The research approach involved a mix of policy analysis and qualitative interviews. It was organised into three overlapping elements: (1) an analysis of the development of the education and training reforms in both countries; (2) an analysis of union strategies, in particular those of the AMWU and the NZEU; and (3) an analysis of key players' recollections of the patterns of development, the role played by unions in each country, and the influence of Australian union strategies (and personalities) on the New Zealand union movement's approach. The principal sources of data were: policy documents, internal union documents, relevant secondary literature and commentaries, and the twenty-three formal interviews. These interviewees were selected by approaching New Zealand unionists who had been involved in the education and training reforms and by following up recommendations from early interviewees: a rolling snowball approach. The

¹ The NZEU is now called the New Zealand Engineering Printing and Manufacturing Union (NZEPMU).

Australian interviews were conducted during 1998 in Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. The New Zealand interviews, also in 1998, were conducted in Wellington and Auckland. All the interviews were conducted by the researcher except that with Laurie Carmichael, which was conducted by Michael Law in late October 1998 and made available to the researcher.

Historical and Theoretical Considerations

The 1970s economic crises had an impact on the political and ideological basis of many OECD nations. Australia and New Zealand were no exceptions (Beilharz, 1994; Campbell & Kirk, 1983). A decline in manufacturing led to high unemployment in that sector (Deeks, Parker & Ryan, 1994, Morgan, 1984). Technological change substantially altered those manufacturing jobs that had not already been phased out, changing the nature of work (Mathews, 1989). Technological change also encouraged a shift to value-added manufacturing in highly industrialised nations, like Germany and Japan (Jurgens, Malsch & Dohse, 1993). Australia and New Zealand, however, struggled to incorporate value-added technology because of the loss of stable British markets and a reliance on the primary sector for exports (Carmichael, 1988; Vocational Training Council, 1986).

This struggle to be internationally competitive led Australia and New Zealand to re-examine their education systems as the resurgence of Schultz's Human Capital Theory (1961), which links education levels to the performance of the economy, took on a persuasive form through the popularisation of neo-liberal ideas (Marginson, 1993; 1997). While this was driven on the whole by policy-makers in both countries, the union movements also had an impact. In Australia, in particular, the AMWU began to popularise an alternative political view to the traditional leading to the 'Accord' (Beilharz, 1994; Bramble, 1997). However, in New Zealand the activism was somewhat muted, a situation compounded by the deregulatory practices of the Fourth Labour Government (Law, 1994).

Boxall and Haynes' (1997) suggest that unions can take four different approaches to the problem of engaging capital in a neo-liberal environment: (1) classic unionism, where the union retains the traditional militant aspects of their bargaining strategies, relying on workplace organising and solidarity in order to maintain leverage; (2) paper tiger unionism, where the union maintains leverage only by formalistic adversarialism, being entirely dependent on state sponsorship for bargaining effectiveness; (3) consultancy unionism, similar to the paper tiger, employs some strategies to organise at workplace level, however, this is entirely dependent on the goodwill of the employer, as there is only formalistic adversarialism; (4) partnership unionism retains an adversarial approach with employers but in an attempt to remain effective also engages in co-operative strategies.

Boxall and Haynes (1997) hold that the NZEU embraces partnership unionism. They claim that part of the extensive co-operative strategies embraced by the NZEU in attempts to remain effective in a neo-liberal environment dovetail with a set of arguments popularised by Streeck in the late 1980s early 1990s. Streeck (1989; 1992) argues that in the face of growing neo-liberalism, unions cannot maintain their classic wage bargaining strategies. Instead, they need to formulate new approaches to bargain with employers. He claims that unions are able to take advantage of the change in technology and the increasing international competition, by offering the employer ways to improve productivity. The most efficient strategy to employ is bargaining on the basis of training, not the traditional wage based approach.

Findings: Government Policy Documents

Australia

According to Pickersgill and Walsh (1998), concern over skill levels in Australia dates back to the turn of the century. This debate took on a renewed intensity in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Skill shortages began to place pressure on the old education and training system, as economic change started to expose the weaknesses in Australia's vocational education system (Junor, 1993, Welch, 1996). Apprenticeships were seen to be; (1) slow to adapt to change; (2) stifling creativity; (3) subject to the cycles of economic growth; (4) with a male bias (Ewer et al, 1991; Welch, 1996).

Against the backdrop of the Accord, union influence at a policy level really began with *Australia Reconstructed* (1987) the result of a fact-finding mission to Europe led by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and organised through the Trade Development Council (TDC), recommended overall that Australia embrace a more 'social democratic' model similar to that of

Sweden and West Germany (ACTU/TDC, 1987, Junor, 1993). The report's chapter on training is seen to have had a lasting impact on the direction of the Australian National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) (Anderson, 1997; Butterworth, 1995; Goozee, 1993; Pickersgill & Walsh, 1998; Welch, 1996).²

Skills for Australia (1987) endorsed the ideas of *Australia reconstructed* (Beilharz, 1994; Goozee, 1993; Welch, 1996). Through its emphasis on international competitiveness, it linked unequivocally education and training with the economy (Brown, 1997, Dawkins & Holding; Goozee, 1993; Welch, 1996). *Skills for manufacturing industry: Future directions*, (1988) articulated the responsibilities of the industrial parties (employers and unions) with regard to skill acquisition (AMC, 1988). *Improving Australia's training system* (1989) identified the link and interdependence of the NTRA with award restructuring through the Structural Efficiency Principle (SEP) (Goozee, 1993).

The *Training costs of award restructuring* (1990) incorporated the economic imperative of neo-liberalism into the NTRA. The *Young people's participation in post compulsory education and training* (1991) recommended that skill components be introduced into university courses and those for labour market entry; this indicated a convergence between general and vocational education was needed (Finn, 1991). *Australian Vocational Certificate Training System* recommended the establishment of a training system incorporating a National Vocational Certificate with associated targets for the participation of every youth under 19 years of age, giving them a 'passport' to any post-compulsory training they chose (Goozee, 1993).

New Zealand

From the 1980s policy makers in New Zealand took a renewed interest in education and training. According to the Vocational Training Council (VTC) (1986), reports from the OECD that emphasised the link between education and the economy fuelled this increased interest as well as domestic, structural reasons. Apprenticeships came to be seen as part of the problem in that they were time-served and inflexible. These concerns prompted a series of policy driven research initiatives.

Learning and achieving: Second report of the committee of inquiry into curriculum, assessment and qualifications in forms 5 to 7 recommended moving to a flexible internal assessment procedure from examinations, allowing the adoption of a national curriculum incorporating achievement-based assessment (Smithers, 1997). The unpublished, but nevertheless very influential (within the public service), draft *Green paper on the New Zealand vocational education and training system and institutional arrangements in the labour market* (1986) endorsed the move to criterion-based assessment, and recommended establishment of procedures to facilitate the credit transfer and co-ordination between secondary and tertiary sectors (Departments of Education and Labour, 1986). *The Management, funding and organisation of post-compulsory education* (1987) recommended the establishment of a National Validation Authority, which would examine and moderate all national qualifications and courses (Probine & Fargher, 1987).

The *Report of the working group on post-compulsory education and training* (1988), drew together all of the previous research completed by the Government on education reform in the mid-1980s in order to recommend the steps needed to implement Government policy (Hawke, 1988). *Learning for life II's* (1989) task was to enable the Labour Government to present its final decisions on the direction of the education and training reform. *Towards a national qualifications framework'* (1990) drew together the loose terms of reference and concepts from *Learning for life II* (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 1990).³ *Designing the framework* (1991a) led to a second round of consultation in presenting policy options, which incorporated features from SCOTVEC, the British National Vocational Qualifications and Australia's national skills strategy (NZQA, 1991a). This led to another discussion document: *The industry skills training strategy* (1991b). Its purpose was to outline National's policy proposals for involving industry in the reformed education and training sectors (NZQA, 1991b).

² The report's impact on unions is elaborated in the interview section.

³ This discussion document was significant in that Chrisp (1998), an official with the NZEU identified this document as the beginning of the union's direct involvement as a stakeholder in the education and training reform process. This is explored further in the findings from the interviews.

Findings from Union Documents

Australia

Historically unions' roles and the scope of bargaining in Australia were framed by the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission's focus on centralised wage fixing and policing awards (Ogden, 1990). Beilharz (1994) adds that even though many unions continually chafed at the restrictions the legislation imposed, they were on the whole content to receive the benefits and thus did not ever wholly oppose the system. However, Ogden (1990) claims the economic crises of the late 1960s and 1970s forced some to re-think their strategies: "From 1977, the AMWU published a series of booklets popularly presenting economic and industry issues for a wide audience amongst its membership, the public, and politicians. These had quite an impact on thinking at many levels (Ogden, 1990, p. 5)". He adds that they prompted other unions to accept that they needed to shift their focus in order to become more concerned with the need to increase industry productivity through industrial democracy and post-Taylorism, instead of simply demanding higher wages. The grim economic conditions gave rise to the realisation that long-term strategies could only be put in place with Government and unions negotiating with each other. These ideas were promoted by the AMWU in *Australia on the rack* (1982) which prefigured the Accord.

According to Ogden, the Accord allowed the union movement to link its short-term goals, such as maintaining living standards, with long-term concerns, such as industrial democracy, technological change, and skill formation. This linkage meant that the unions were able to move from short-term, reactive, militant, pragmatism, to pro-active, consensual, short and long-term strategic planning. Thus, wages policy and union strategy moved beyond maintaining living standards to driving industrial reform (Ogden, 1990). Subsequent union publications began to outline how in the implementation of award restructuring, the elements of industrial democracy, workplace change or post-Taylorism and the NTRA all linked in together to provide the Australian union movement a base from which to achieve its societal vision.

New Zealand

Compulsory arbitration and conciliation created unions that were largely legislation-dependent and legislation contained, with union activities centred on annual rounds (Deeks et al, 1994). At different times more militant unions tried to break out of this legislation. However, the state, suppressed this action, inevitably weakening unions (Law, 1994). This created a division in the union movement. In addition, the split into public and private sector central bodies compounded other divisions and weakened the union movement's claim to represent coherently workers as a whole (Deeks et al, 1994). In retrospect, Jones (1992) argues that the fall-out from the international oil crises, falling commodity prices, and an unstable banking sector all served to illustrate that New Zealand was becoming increasingly vulnerable economically. Thus, in spite of some unions' inactivity and unwillingness to adapt, thinking within the union movement began to change. This is supported in the interview findings, at least with respect to the NZEU.

Influenced by the AMWU, the NZEU developed a strategy in response to the Labour Relations Act 1987 (LRA) whereby it worked with companies in order to achieve workplace change. This embraced Australian ideas about post-Taylorism, industrial democracy, and to a limited extent, training. Jones (1992) argues, that the NZEU accepted that workers' best interests are served if all parties involved contribute to production. The union implemented this strategy because it did not envisage a return to wage militancy. The union had to develop new ways of getting around the neo-liberal agenda, which was strengthened by the election of the National Government in 1990. The lynchpin of the NZEU's post 1990 strategic vision became education and training (Jones, 1992).

Selected findings from the interviews

This section presents the findings from the interviews completed in Australia and New Zealand. The findings in this section are arranged in a loose chronological order established in earlier sections. The five clusters of themes identified in the introduction run throughout this section.

Australia

Several interviewees (e.g. Carmichael, Lloyd, Mansfield, Ogden and Pickersgill) emphasised that in order to understand award restructuring and the education and training reforms it is necessary to examine the political economy debate that led to the signing of the Accord. At the heart of the debate were the ideas generated by the CPA-AMWU think-tank (Beilharz, 1994). As this study progressed, it became increasingly clear that much of that thinking, especially as it was applied to education and training, pivoted around Carmichael's vision.⁴ Equally important, perhaps, was the strength of his personality. His vision was infectious; in the New Zealand interviews, several respondents refer to it directly.

In his interview, Carmichael outlines the long gestation of the ideas that eventually led to award restructuring and education and training reform. Referring to the mid-1970s, he speaks of the "dichotomy between vocational and general education" and the need to overcome it and how technology would enable this, raising the question of how the union movement could then facilitate it. This led to a questioning of the unions' relationship with industry and an examination of industry itself. Linked to this questioning was his traditional opposition to Taylorism and interest in industrial democracy. Others, like Lloyd and Ogden, agree that post-Taylorism and industrial democracy were part of the dominant views in the AMWU.

According to Mansfield by the 1980s, the union movement accepted that it had to work with capital in order to increase productivity: "we had to change... to meet the needs of our members... and... make the overall economy more competitive and through that assist in the process of economic recovery." Lloyd and Pickersgill both hold that the international debate surrounding production systems informed this awareness: "the productivist ... and training paradigms that were important in Germany, the social democratic countries in Europe, influenced the Australian metal workers" (Pickersgill, 1998). Lloyd states there were two paths that capital could follow in its attempt to make the Australian economy more internationally competitive: (1) the social democratic; and (2) that followed by Japan, where workers were turned into the tools of production rather than gaining a measure of independence through workplace democracy.

Once the Accord was in place and Hawke's Labour Government was elected, a framework was established to push the union movement's reform agenda. Mansfield identifies two structural factors that provided the impetus to award restructuring: (1) the historical nature of the award structures and demarcation disputes acting as impediments to efficient economic performance; and (2) the lack of good training opportunities except for those in craft trades; and little or no career structure. Unions recognised that they had to update awards in order to maintain their relevance in the contemporary context. This highlighted the need to change the infrastructure around training. Mansfield outlines two major limitations of the education and training system of the early 1980s: (1) the unequal opportunities created with structured training being limited to craft trades, as the emerging new employment areas did not have structured training in place in the early 1980s; and (2) the fractured, state-based structure where qualifications only had currency in the state in which they were completed.

The international debate that had informed award restructuring and the Accord also linked into the training agenda. Lloyd states that the AMWU, "had learnt... from our Swedish colleagues that skill played quite a significant role in their... wage bargaining... investment in training seemed to be... critical reasons why they weren't suffering as a manufacturing nation." He holds that all these factors driving the reforms to education and training began to come, "together with a bit of strategy in 1988... a clear strategy to do something."

Australia Reconstructed was a part of this reform strategy. The report brought together the ideas and the debates of the 1970s, and wove them into a practical strategy. Carmichael observes that *Australia Reconstructed* had a long gestation, citing a legacy of previous AMWU publications, like *Australia Uprooted* and *Australia Ripped-off*. He adds that *Australia Reconstructed* was a marketing exercise as the mission deliberately comprised representatives from both the 'right' and 'left' of the union movement "because... the 'left' was just as big a bloody problem as the 'right'!" Thus, he "wanted an exclusively trade union [mission] because the fight was inside the Labour movement." He

⁴ Carmichael's vision will be outlined in full in a complementary paper also presented to this conference (Law & Piercy, 2000)

saw the mission as simply a natural extension of the vision that led to the Accord. Mansfield claims that the report raised critical questions for the union movement to address, stating that the report had immense value, both as an educational activity and a marketing exercise. Carnegie, who worked for the ACTU concurs, *Australia Reconstructed* was “the watershed year.” Pickersgill observes, *Australia Reconstructed* was highly sought after at senior policy...and...curriculum levels...It represented a consensus position.” Both Carnegie and Pickersgill agree that it was through *Australia Reconstructed* that the education and training reforms come to the forefront of union strategy.

The links between the award restructuring/*Australia Reconstructed* debate and formal Government reports began to take shape in 1987. Pickersgill states that *Skills for Australia*, (1987), (a government document that Mansfield and Ogden both believe Carmichael wrote with the Minister of Education, John Dawkins) is the point where the Federal Government’s strategy effectively adopted and endorsed that driven by the unions. However, it was through the SEP⁵ that arguments about skill based career paths and their link to productivity arrangements came together (Dawkins, 1989). Lloyd holds that the AMWU and, in particular, Carmichael had got their ideas together by 1987/88 and that “the ideas of skill played quite a significant role in the whole process of wage bargaining.” This particular recollection is supported by a little known document, a speech by Carmichael (1988) to the Footscray Institute of Technology in which he explicitly makes the award classification – skills benchmarking link. He states that it was a fairly logical step from award restructuring and education and training reform to career pathing. “... and from career pathing to convergence of vocational and general education...”. With his appointment to government committees, Carmichael was well placed to promote his agenda throughout the education and training sector as well as the union movement.

Both the Australian literature and the interviewees accentuate the role of the AMWU. Carmichael, Lloyd and Ogden claim that this interest in education and training forms part of the metal workers’ culture. Mansfield also endorses these views and relates the AMWU leadership in education and training to its traditional lead role in bargaining. This was confirmed by (Geoff) Hawke who recalls that it was the unions who set the pace and had the most ‘intelligent’ input: “employers very often deferred to some of the union representatives because they knew that they understood the issues in a way that they didn’t.”

The AMWU had an impact in New Zealand. Ogden states that he was the first person from the AMWU to visit New Zealand to specifically discuss the changes in Australia: “Traditionally there hadn’t been a lot of connections between New Zealand and Australia... believing that the equivalent union in New Zealand traditionally meant a right wing union.” He attributes this change to the election of Rex Jones as Secretary of the NZEU in 1984. “In 1987⁶ I got invited to New Zealand by the Engineers Union... and presented in a seminar... the... post-Fordist thinking... award restructuring... the... skills agenda and how it all fitted together.” Ogden recalls that after this visit he recommended that closer relations be established between the two unions; since then “it’s just been a constant flow backwards and forwards of people coming and going around the skills agenda.”

Lloyd also played a prominent role in trans-Tasman co-operation. He supplied information to those who visited Australia and went to New Zealand several times. Thus, he was able to provide some insight into why the NZEU adopted Australian ideas; he cites Rogernomics and the need to develop industry policy. He also notes that once the NZEU brought the Australian ideas over and began to play around with them, the AMWU started to receive “fairly consistent delegations, New Zealand unions not just the Engineers, the Distribution Workers. Quite different groups [even employers] were coming to...talk...to me and my colleagues in the research centre about...the ideas that were...here.”

New Zealand

The NZEU interviewees confirmed Australian observations on the unions’ relationship. They point to the importance of Rex Jones’ election as National Secretary as a shift to the political ‘left’ which allowed an institutional link to be built over original personal connections.

Eichbaum recalls that earlier some within the NZEU had attempted to follow and apply aspects of the AMWU’s contributions to the Australian political economy debate: “a number of [us]

⁵ The structural efficiency principle was established in the 1988 National Wage Case (Goozee, 1993).

⁶ Chrisp in his interview confirms this visit, reported in the New Zealand section.

who were... involved with the Labour Party were trying to promote... some positive consideration of an income/prices agreement, not dissimilar to the ALP/ACTU Accord.” He adds however: “The ’84 Labour Government chose not to go down the path of the Accord... notwithstanding though, we did attempt on a number of occasions, including through... award rounds, to try and get some understanding up and running.” Although the unions failed to achieve a compact with the NZLP, their early initiatives hinted at an inclination to look across the Tasman: for example Chrisp holds that, “the Accord Mark I was... informative in terms of ideas coming across the Tasman.”

Elsewhere, NZCTU Secretary, Foulkes recalls how the changing nature of work in Banking linked into education and training issues, “the Bankers’ Institute exams were at least ten years out of date... It coincided with... the restructuring of the labour market and the economy [and] that led to... [education and training reform] discussion.” Tolich echoes these observations using the printing industry to emphasise how changing technology also acted as a driving force that changed the regulated environment.

The changing nature of work contributed to the push for award restructuring. Eichbaum identifies two main factors: (1) “...within the Engineers’ Union... national awards were very important in terms of holding the organisation together...”; (2) “We decided early on that what we needed to do was retain those awards essentially for equity reasons... coverage and security.” He also observes that the Union realised that it had to follow the AMWU’s example.

Eichbaum acknowledges that this changed stance was both “a reaction to the Labour Relations Act and an acknowledgement of the fact that even the Labour Relations Act was going to be at risk under an alternative government.” He adds and Chrisp concurs, that international ideas about productivity were also influential in moulding thinking within the NZEU. Like Australia, the model was the ‘social democratic’ one. Eichbaum states that within the Union then was a realisation that the traditional Luddite approach to technology was not sustainable as “it was no longer appropriate to run a defensive strategy”. Instead the union had to find common ground with the employer in order to embrace technology as a tool to enhance rather than detract from the production process.

Chrisp adds how, from the mid-1980s, as the Roger Douglas inspired economic reforms filtered through, job loss was also a major factor that encouraged the NZEU to look across the Tasman. He identified a survey of union membership as a watershed point for the union as it exposed the union’s inability to deal with job security. From this, he argues, came the realisation that the only way to move forward was to become internationally competitive. He states that the survey was used to push acceptance of “an agenda that was about building wealth as opposed to simple distributing wealth” both within the union itself and the broader membership. Smith indicates this was part of deliberate union education programme.

However, the NZEU came late to the education and training policy debate, Moorehouse, an NZQA industry liaison officer, states “I don’t think they were influential necessarily in getting the policies established.” However, once the debate began to coalesce around a deliberate strategy, the unions, especially the NZEU, quickly saw the opportunities offered by the education and training reforms. As a result, they sought to become more engaged in the reform process from the late 1980s early 1990s. In part this was because the NZEU was already moving in this direction, Smith holds that once the review of industry training began in earnest with the Learning for Life process the union began to become increasingly involved in education and training reform.

Eichbaum argues that the Union’s wish to extend training to workers who were not part of the craft tradition was also part of the rationale for moving into training reform: “[training] came on the agenda because of a fault, the need to address the requirements of those who had typically been excluded from systematic training.” He adds “...the notion of career paths in the context of national awards which covered process workers and time-served tradespeople was an important part of the mix...”. He adds that this would allow the achievement of other goals “In an expedient sense, if you could link those groups through career paths, you could also link them organisationally in support of a range of other things.”

The strategic thinking behind this organisational concept resonates with some of the theoretical analysis developed by Streeck (1992; 1989) that is discussed in the introduction. Specifically, by the late 1980s the NZEU officials saw training reform as a concept they could use to maintain a bargaining edge with employers in an increasingly unfriendly environment. What informed this strategic thinking were the ideas of the AMWU and, more particularly, the publication of

Australia Reconstructed. Several interviewees emphasise the importance of that report, Tolich goes so far as to call it a “seminal work”. *Australia Reconstructed* gave the Union tools with which to create an alternative agenda to sustain the organisation at a time when its very relevancy was being questioned. As a result, Eichbaum recalls, in 1988 the NZEU sponsored a joint-mission to Australia. The union did this to gain the acceptance of the union movement and employers about the possibility of bringing an alternative political system closer to reality through “a much wider sense of ownership.”

The AMWU influence on the NZEU gathered pace from the late 1980s and into the 1990s. That influence was achieved through: documents, exchanges of officials, attendance at conferences, workshops in both countries; and missions to Australia. The election of the National Government in 1990 and its subsequent legislative reforms, such as the Employment Contracts Act 1991, the abolition of TUEA; and the Industry Training Act 1992 (ITA), limited the scope of the NZEU’s influence. Nevertheless, while award restructuring was hampered by National’s agenda, the Government’s ideas on training gave the union a residual platform to pursue part of its strategy.

According to Jones, National, unlike the previous Labour Government, did not choose to leave training in “benign neglect”. Instead it made it a priority area. Jones claims that Birch went on overseas missions and came back full of favour for the apprenticeship system. He argues that the Union’s advisory position was strong due to its knowledge, but such was the suspicion of employers and Government appointees to key committees, including a Business Roundtable activist, that ideas like skills-based pay and other Australian influenced ideas were removed from the agenda. Jones states that in the attempt to remain ideologically faithful, National, in removing the apprenticeship system, destroyed the old infrastructure and never replaced it – leaving it to the individual choice of the users. Jones claims that this made the “Industrial Training Act ... impossible to work with... [for example] the definition of industry.”

This reduced level of NZEU influence is a major trans-Tasman distinction. Lythe, an NZQA official, notes, “In Australia the unions are... powerful because the Government... has a tripartite view of the world, so the development of... training arrangements in Australia always had union participation... In New Zealand the reverse is the case.” However, Smith holds that the Union continued to attempt to influence the industry training reforms because “in spite of the limitations of what they had done we should get in and promote... [the] skills strategy because it offered us the opportunity to set up... our objective... skills-based pay.” Chrisp persevered in promoting the ‘Industry Skills Strategy’. He argues that “we did have an important influence in marketing it and getting it accepted around the country” and ensuring that the legislation had “a reference to... the involvement of employees in the industry.” Another point of influence was the Engineering Industry Training Organisation (EITO). Smith was its first chairperson, in part because Carroll, the Director of the Auckland Provincial Employers’ Association, was extremely influential in terms of ensuring that the Union was a part of the ITO. This was important, as the ITA did not require unions to be represented on ITOs.

While they were a part of the interim EITO, the Union commissioned a survey to ascertain what was needed “to get a progressive, forward looking ITO.” Another big influence, once the Board was up and running, was the development of engineering unit standards. The Union worked to bring officials from the Australian Metals Industry Training Body to New Zealand (Jenkins from MITA and van Berkel from the AMWU). Thus, despite these difficulties, Jones concludes that “yes we did have quite a strong influence in the industry-led policy on skill New Zealand strategy.”

The Union’s high level of influence within the EITO meant that its expertise was quite widely acknowledged within the union movement and the wider training community. Moorehouse comments on what it was like to work with the NZEU: “they’ve been a really good union to work with, really strong. They’ve probably been the most active... They’ve always got strong representation on the ITO board and they’re still driving it today. Leitch, the first CEO of the EITO, endorses these comments. He argues that the Union, particularly Smith, was extremely important in terms of understanding the ideas that underpinned the reforms and communicating that understanding both to the other members of the board and the Engineering industry itself. He notes that it was the Union’s awareness that this was an effective agenda with which to negotiate that made it pursue the skills strategy so pro-actively.

These views are shared by other observers from within the union movement. Doyle, formerly with TUEA and then the CTU, offers a holistic view of the union movement's activities in the education and training reforms. She sees the NZEU, as an exception to the norm, and within that, the activities of certain individuals, such as Chrisp, being highly significant. Foulkes echoes this: "I'm not certain how many people really got deeply involved in the training agenda. Clearly the Engineers did, they always have done it."

All roads, however, lead back to the Australian influence and the pro-active culture it induced in the NZEU, as Chrisp puts it:

the culture of the Engineers' Union at the time was proud of that pro-activeness, very, very proud, consciously, explicitly, proud of the fact that even though the ideas weren't ours, we were still able to articulate them... We had] a certain pride that we didn't have our tails between our legs because we were losing 6,000 manufacturing jobs, we were actually out there creating a new agenda for change which meant a new style of unionism...That sophistication and thinking I attribute...directly to the metal workers...TUTA...and *Australia Reconstructed*.

Conclusion

In summary, what emerges from the Australian interviews, even if memories have dimmed, is a consistent picture of an intensifying pattern of networking. This began with the warming of the relationship between the AMWU and the NZEU in the mid-1980s and gathered pace over the following decade. It then extended out, beyond the NZEU, to include other New Zealand unions. Of some significance also, was the Australians' recognition that the different approach being taken by New Zealand's Labour Government – Rogernomics – was driving New Zealand unions to seek some inspiration. Also present in the interviews was a hint that the Australians recognised how an alternative (Liberal) government would be attracted by the New Zealand experiment.

What emerges from the New Zealand interviews is that the role of AMWU ideas were pivotal in the development of an understanding of why the education and training reforms needed to take shape the way they did. The New Zealand interviewees' understanding of these ideas highlight the depth of the AMWU's influence in New Zealand. Finally the interviews evidence the adoption of the 'partnership unionism' mentioned in the introduction and endorse Streeck's argument on the usefulness of training in maintaining bargaining effectiveness.

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