

Can Labor's Social Inclusion Agenda deliver?



THE NEW FEDERAL LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS PLACED 'SOCIAL INCLUSION' AT THE FRONT AND CENTRE OF ITS AGENDA TO TACKLE DISADVANTAGE. AUSTRALIA HAS ITS FIRST MINISTER FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION WHO IS ALSO THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, SENDING A STRONG SIGNAL THAT THIS ISSUE IS CENTRAL TO THE WORK OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT.

The Minister has announced that she wants to tackle a broad range of issues in order to make Australia a more socially inclusive society. Issues like homelessness, education retention rates, health outcomes, dental health, long term unemployment, employment for people with disabilities and mental health issues, and rental/home affordability. And to do this the federal government is wanting closer cooperation between the Commonwealth, the states and territories and the not-for-profit sector. If the United Kingdom's experience of 'social inclusion' is anything to go by, a government which is committed to setting clear measurable targets to reduce disadvantage and increase social inclusion can make real progress – for example, child poverty rates in the UK have dropped by 4% between 1997-2004 and the number of homeless people 'sleeping rough' fell from 1,850 in 1998 to 498 in 2007.

But who will implement the new social inclusion programs, plans and services?

It will be Social and Community Services (SACS) workers who will be at the forefront and front line in delivering social inclusion.

However services are reporting major problems attracting and keeping skilled staff as workers leave the industry to

For more information on the C.A.R.E. campaign, see pages 4 and 5

move to better paid jobs and better career paths elsewhere. Research undertaken by the ASU, industry peak groups and academics show that this trend will continue unless urgent action is taken. An ASU survey of members in 2007 showed that 52% of people were not committed to stay working in the industry beyond the next 5 years. The overwhelming reason given by these workers was the low pay in the industry. Workers in the non government sector are paid a minimum of \$10-15,000 per year less than equivalent work done in the public sector.

We need to address some key areas if we are going to be serious about this problem. We need a big boost to funding for wages to recognise the value of the work, the complexity of the work and the skills required to do the work. We also need a comprehensive plan for workforce training and education and we need career paths as incentives to keep people working in this industry. We need the NSW and ACT governments to commit to a time line for addressing these issues.

The ASU's C.A.R.E Campaign is all about how we can work together to address these issues.

There is a lot of new energy from government in supporting the new social inclusion agenda – one which ASU members everywhere heartily welcome. But without a plan to ensure we have a skilled workforce that can deliver high quality services our social inclusion agenda will fall far short of its goals – and none of us want this.

COMMUNITY AND DISABILITY SURVEY LAUNCHED
The ASU is conducting the largest survey of disability and community workers ever. This survey is the first stage of building a NEW STANDARD for our sector. If you have not received it, please contact the ASU office on 9310 4000.

YOUR SACS TEAM

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICES
COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT 2007 – 2011

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FROM THE SECRETARY



The launch of the C.A.R.E. campaign for wage justice for community and disability workers is an historic moment for the non-government community sector. We have come a long way since a small group of youth workers formed the union 30 years ago; however we still have a long way to go if we are to win the wages we deserve and quality services for our communities.

Nurses and Teachers, through organising in their unions, started the same journey over 50 years ago. They have won recognition as a profession, together with professional rates of pay, education and training. They have also fought for and won improved standards of education and care, smaller classroom sizes and patient/staff ratios. These fights were not easy. They took determination and years of organising and campaigning. The first step was to unite as many workers in their industry as possible in their unions. They built strong unions and these strong unions had the power to win campaigns.

Approximately 25% of workers in our industry are union members. This is not good enough and we will not be able to achieve the goals we set unless non-members also get on board and join the ASU.

Imagine how strong and significant we will be with all community and disability workers united in the union. This is a job for all of us. If there are non-members in your workplace, it is your job to give them a membership form and encourage them to join today.

HOW TO CONTACT US

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ASU STATEMENT TAKEN TO THE 2020 SUMMIT

ASU ASSISTANT NATIONAL SECRETARY LINDA WHITE IS TAKING THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT TO THE 2020 SUMMIT TO GET SACS WORKERS ISSUES ON THE AGENDA.



STATEMENT:

"The important work of strengthening communities, supporting families and promoting social inclusion is fundamental to the job of the non-government social and community services (SACS) worker.

People employed in the non government SACS industry work in a broad variety of areas including services in disability, family support, homelessness, youth, employment support, women and mental health, and neighbourhood centres and community legal centres.

These services are found in every community across Australia – urban and rural, indigenous and migrant



ASU reps to the 2020 Summit: Katrine Hildyard to the far left and Linda White to the far right, Senator Anne McEwen and ASU-SANT Branch, President Pam Andritsakis between them.

communities, and in every locality in the country. People that work in these services, along with their volunteer Boards of Management are central to creating a socially inclusive society.

A significant barrier remains in reaching our social inclusion goal – services are not funded to adequately remunerate employees at the level required to attract and retain the highly skilled staff needed to provide quality support and services.

The non government SACS industry was established in Australia in the late 1970s and 1980s to quickly and cheaply extend social service capacity and reach beyond government service provision. These services were also regarded as more flexible and closer to the community than government. Thus social service provision developed at the local level by self-managed groups with some government funding, heavily reliant on volunteers and often paying staff below minimum wages.

The role of non-government community services and the skills and expertise required has changed since this time. Governments are increasingly reliant on this industry and it has grown significantly. Predictions are that the industry will continue to grow up to 2020. While many aspects of service provision have changed, the industry's poor funding and wages compared to government services has not.

FUNDING PRESSURES MEAN THERE IS A MAJOR CRISIS IN ATTRACTING AND RETAINING STAFF.

There are many examples of the paucity of funding. If we as a nation are truly committed to strengthening communities and building social inclusion we must look to strengthening the non-government social and community services industry.

Some funding problems faced by services include:

- workers in the non government services sector are paid on average \$15,000 less than workers doing exactly the same job in the government sector;
- services having great difficulty attracting and retaining skilled staff;
- funding contracts from some government funding agencies regard the funding provided as a contribution to service provision, leaving services with massive shortfalls if they are unable to raise funds themselves;
- government often provides no additional yearly funding to cover increasing costs of service provision;
- many services simply have no funding to provide training and skills enhancement for the workforce.

Funding pressures mean there is a major crisis in attracting and retaining staff. This will only increase as the workforce shrinks and labour market pressures grow.

Without a recognition of the complexity and importance of this work in building social capital and strengthening the capacity of our communities, workers will simply choose to work elsewhere.

We must urgently address the under-funding of the non government SACS industry and poor wages of the workforce through industry planning strategies between governments, unions, employers and peak organisations."

A new vision for disability and community services

We need a new vision for Community Services.

Community Services work with the most marginalised and disadvantaged members of our community. Each day we deliver services like disability services, youth services, homeless services, womens services, community care services, community legal services, housing services, family support services, relationship services, neighbourhood services, information and referral services, settlement services, community education services, mental health services, drug and alcohol services – the list goes on and on.

These services are drastically under-funded and face a serious crisis in attracting and retaining skilled staff. If these issues are not addressed then quality services cannot be delivered to the most needy and disadvantaged in our community.

A socially-inclusive society is one which embraces all of the members of the community and seeks to address disadvantage wherever it is encountered. To build an inclusive society we need to ensure that the multiple needs of clients



are met. This will require a workforce for the future – one that is highly skilled across many areas of work – a workforce that is professionally paid, well trained and with a dynamic and transferable set of skills.

We need new Standards for our industry. Standards that ensure:

- Quality service delivery
- A highly skilled workforce
- Wages and working conditions that truly reflect the value of the work we do

- Workplace Safety
- Access to and recognition for education and professional development

Community and disability service workers are the heart and soul of the community sector – new Standards for quality community services start with us! We deserve to be recognised for the work we do, however we must also have new expectations of ourselves and each other. We must work toward acknowledgement of our value and the contributions of our industry.

OUR VISION MUST BE BASED IN ACTION: A PLAN FOR COMMUNITY, ADVOCACY, RESPECT, EQUITY.

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A Campaign and a Sector we believe in

COMMUNITY A community has space for everyone. We believe that every person has the right to participation and inclusion in society. We believe that we can no longer afford to leave people in our communities behind. We commit to working together to achieve the standard of quality community services needed to achieve this goal.

ADVOCACY The rights of individuals and groups to advocate on their own and others' behalf is fundamental to a democratic society. We believe our sector is perfectly placed as an advocate for ourselves, each other, and the communities and individuals with whom we engage. In this campaign we will work together to advocate for a fair deal for community services.

RESPECT Every person is entitled to dignity and respect. All people have the right to participate and be supported by their governments and communities. As workers who perform essential work within our communities, we deserve respect for the work we do. Therefore, we commit to campaign for better funded services. These services must be delivered by a highly skilled, well paid and well trained workforce in which every worker receives dignity and respect.

EQUITY Every person is entitled to be treated fairly and justly valued for their contributions. We believe that Social and Community Services make a significant

valuable contribution and we believe that this contribution should be recognised and acknowledged. We commit to working to ensure that work of equal value receives equal pay. We deliver programs on behalf of the government yet there is an unacceptable gap between the pay and conditions of public sector and community sector workers.

A LONG TERM SOLUTION

This campaign plan is unlike any other we have adopted before. This is not a short term plan with short term fixes. A long term plan means we have long term goals. A long term solution allows us to have a big picture vision. It will not be easy. It will not be achieved quickly.

We have made do for too long. It's time for a big picture view and for us to commit to the long term goals necessary to realise that view. It is only in this way we can build an industry that is properly funded to deliver the services needed. This is the only way we can attract and retain the workforce we need. It is the only way our sector can be valued as it should be.

We need to work together to address the big issues facing our sector:

FUNDING – We must build an industry that is, in the long term, properly funded by governments. This funding system must be reflective of the community needs, the needs of the sector and the needs of the organisations that contribute

to it. We must shift government from the practice of short term funding with short term, politically motivated outcomes, to long term ongoing funding reflecting the reality of the industry.

WORKFORCE EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT

– It is essential that we attract and retain a highly skilled workforce – a workforce continually skilled to address the complexity of the challenges that confront them. But we need support and resources to ensure the workforce is strengthened and its capacity increased to meet the complex needs of our clients. And, we need to lock in an industry-wide plan for education, training and development.

WAGE PARITY – We must commit to the principle of equal pay for equal work. We must seek to be valued equitably with our colleagues in the public sector.

A THREE PHASED PLAN

The campaign that we will develop will be a long term campaign. Our campaign will build an alliance that extends across and beyond the political divide. Our campaign will ensure that all political parties commit to implementing the key elements of our strategy. Our campaign is flexible enough to respond to changes in government, and robust enough to hold government to account. Our campaign provides the scaffolding on which our sector can grow and develop, where workers are properly recognised for the work they do.

MISSION WORKERS JOIN TO PROTECT COMMUNITY WORKERS RIGHTS AT WORK

MISSION COMMUNITY SERVICE WORKERS ACROSS NSW AND THE ACT WORK UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF A NATIONAL ENTERPRISE AGREEMENT. THE AGREEMENT, WHICH HAS SEEN CONDITIONS FOR WORKERS IN NSW FALL BEHIND THE AWARD, IS NOW UP FOR NEGOTIATIONS.

Mission is one of the big players in our sector – it's important for all of us that they do not undermine the CARE Campaign to set a new standard for our industry. Mission union members whole heartedly agree!

The ASU is currently a party to the Mission Australia collective agreement. Workers on Union agreements have better pay and conditions than those on non-union (or employee) agreements. It came as quite a surprise to see Mission Australia offering their workers the 'opportunity' to vote on if they wanted a Union or a Non-Union agreement before negotiations even began. It's like asking them if they would like the opportunity to get paid less!

The industry wide C.A.R.E. campaign will improve conditions for all workers. Mission Australia workers are also uniting and organising to improve theirs. More than 100 workers have become active in the Mission Australia campaign by joining the ASU.



Mission workers Dave Murphy, Lee Edwards and Frances Morjanovic

Mission workers have had their opportunity to vote, not surprisingly they have voted for a Union agreement. Negotiations will begin soon and Mission workers are really not asking for much. Mission workers want to fix what is wrong with their current agreement, they want to make improvements to their agreement and they want to ensure that they never again find themselves falling behind other workers in the sector.

Supporting Workers Rights

IMAGINE BEING BEATEN, IMPRISONED AND THEN DENIED MEDICAL TREATMENT FOR TAKING PART IN PEACEFUL PROTESTS.



Union members protest at a rally in Hyde park Sydney against the violation of workers rights in Iran

It is almost unimaginable because freedom of speech and expression is a right in Australia and it is an international law. However, unionists, in many countries around the globe are denied this right. Currently in Iran, trade union leaders Mansour Osanloo and Mahmoud Salehi have been imprisoned because of their independent voice defending fundamental workers' rights.

The Iranian state bears many of the hallmarks of a fascist state regime – it does not tolerate dissidents. Mansour Osanloo is the head of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company trade union. Although the organisation is legal it has been violently attacked by Iranian security forces. As a result of his work Osanloo has been beaten, arrested and had his tongue sliced as a warning against speaking out.

Salehi is spokesman for the Organisational Committee to Establish Trade Unions. He was arrested after a peaceful demonstration to celebrate

May Day 2004 but subsequently released on bail. In 2005 he was sentenced to five years imprisonment and three years internal exile. At his trial his union activities and meetings with foreign unions were cited as evidence against him. His conviction was then overturned but after a retrial he was sentenced on 11 November 2006 to four years imprisonment for "conspiring to commit crimes against national security", later reduced to one years imprisonment and a three year suspended sentence. He was jailed again in April last year.

Osanloo and Salehi were convicted of "endangering state security" and "anti-regime propaganda". This is simply the spin of a regime intent on controlling the minds of citizens in order to obtain total power and control.

They are not the only victims. Several workers in Iran have been fined and flogged in the city of Sanandaj, according to a report by the National Union of Dismissed and Unemployed Workers of Iran. Their crime? Taking part in May Day celebrations in 2007.

On March 6th Australian unions participated in an International response. 'Free Osanloo Action Day' was marked by protests worldwide to demand the release of the imprisoned trade union leaders. The protest coordinated by the International Transport Workers Federation took

place in more than 45 countries and demonstrated global solidarity.

In Sydney, a number of unions joined together in Hyde Park to stand up for the fundamental rights of all Iranian citizens.

David Cockroft, International Transport Workers Federation general secretary said: "The Iranian government's continuing mistreatment of Mansour is a running sore. He has asked only for his basic rights and has been answered with fists, truncheons and manacles – but he has not been forgotten. On March 6 we will once again prove that he has friends and supporters around the world."

We must act to prevent this criminal regime jeopardising and harming working people suffering in Iran.

People around the world have protested against the repression and violation of human rights. Political parties and labour organisations, trade unions, human rights organisations and institutions - Red Cross, Amnesty International for example, have all condemned the violations of the rights of workers, teachers, students, women and children in Iran. They are actively exposing this regime at global level. The international support and solidarity with social movements in Iran is growing strongly and actively more than ever.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK — YOUR EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT

Everyone knows that it is important to understand your conditions of employment so that you understand your entitlements and obligations. Most people know about Awards and Enterprise Agreements. These are collective agreements that set minimum pay and conditions for all workers in a workplace or industry. They are the critical safety net underpinning the rights of Australian employees that the Howard Government's WorkChoices legislation threatened to abolish.

Another crucial part of your employment conditions, which is often less well understood, is your contract of employment. Your contract of employment can contain rights and obligations for you as an employee in addition to your rights under an Award or Enterprise Agreement.

Your contract of employment is fundamental to your employment relationship and without a contract you are not an employee. A contract of employment may contain conditions of employment on matters not covered by the Award or Enterprise Agreement such as your place of work or hours of work for part time employees. A contract of employment may also contain

conditions over and above your entitlements under an Award or Enterprise Agreement such as a higher rate of pay than the Award rate or company policies.

A contract of employment cannot contain conditions of employment that are less than the conditions required by an Award or Enterprise Agreement. Awards and Enterprise agreements set the minimum conditions that apply to a group of employees. The main difference between a contract of employment and an Australian Workplace Agreement was that under Workchoices AWAs allowed employers to cut pay and conditions below the minimum required in an Enterprise Agreement or Award. Also you are not prevented from entering a collective agreement if you are on a common law contract.

A contract of employment might not always look like a contract. Often your letter of appointment to a position will be your contract of employment. A verbal agreement or an exchange of emails or letters could also become your contract if they represent an agreement between you and your employer.

To be a valid contract you need to agree to the contract but that doesn't

necessarily mean you need to sign it. Your agreement to the contract may be implied if you act as if the contract applies to you. For example you can be taken to agree to the conditions of employment contained in your letter of offer just by turning up for work. That is why it is important to take action immediately if you don't like what your contract says.

Here are some important things to know about your contract of employment:

- Firstly, take a moment to read it carefully, make sure you understand what it says and that you are happy with the contract.
- If you don't understand it get in contact with your workplace delegate or the ASU Organising Members Information Centre to get some advice.
- Keep it! It is important to keep a copy of your contract in order to make sure your conditions are not undermined.
- If your employer offers you a new contract of employment DO NOT SIGN IT until you have contacted the union office to check that the changes are fair.



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