



National Office Bulletin

RTBU Members' Newsletter 1/2005

The Future of Training: Challenges for Unions

In the first edition of *your* RTBU National Office Bulletin:

- Howard government drops ball on training and blames unions!
- Employer solution to skills shortages - immigrant labour!
- Challenges for unions...

It is clear from recent media coverage that the Howard government is blaming unions for the current pressure on wages rather than highlighting the fact that there are skills shortages and these shortages are pushing up wages for some occupations. Unions need to challenge this focus and promote the fact that we have been lobbying for decades for a higher level of training. These current skills shortages and their consequences are not the fault of unions but rather the result of the Howard government dropping the ball on training.

To address these shortages, some employers are spending their time investigating the use of migrant labour rather than investing in training. In our industry, the Australasian Railway Association (ARA), the rail employer body, is about to begin lobbying the government to change immigration laws to allow rail workers qualified overseas to easily migrate to Australia. The position of the labour movement to this 'initiative' is that it is a short term response, does nothing to add to the skill level of Australian workers and is simply a reaction by the Howard government as a result of it dropping the ball on training.

In the face of immediate shortages for some skilled labour, some employers are also arguing that the current competency based training system takes too long. They are trying to introduce shorter courses or reduced qualifications. For example, if employers had their way, instead of being trained as a Train Examiner to Certificate III level, a worker might only be trained in one part of the job, for example the component for changing brake blocks.

Against this backdrop the ACTU held a forum for unions on the *Future of Training* last Friday, 18th February 2005.

In addition to the issues discussed already, some of the concerns which sparked this forum included:

1. the abolition by the Howard government of the body which governs competency based training – the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA),
2. unease about the direction the Howard government might choose for training after it wins control over the Senate in July 2005 including future funding issues, and
3. attempts by some employer bodies to grab control over training and funding for training, and their agenda to exclude the union movement.

The challenges for the union movement to ensure the future of competency based training for Australian workers have been set. The union movement and union members will meet the challenge through cementing training arrangements in enterprise agreements, actively participating in the existing training framework and other measures to stop employers from eroding the training system.

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