Trade Union Organising Strategies and Union Revitalisation:

A case study of the Queensland branch of United Voice.

Craig Brown, workshop 1.5
Objectives:

- To evaluate the appropriateness of the ‘organising approach’ as a solution to trade union decline.
- To examine how a particular union is transforming itself in response to declining union density.
- To devise a method to measure the effectiveness of the strategy adopted by the Queensland branch of United Voice.
• Formerly known as the LHMU.
• The LHMU was formed by the amalgamation of the FMWU and FLAIEU in 1992.
• The Queensland branch currently has around 28,000 members, 67% of the membership are female.
• They are a general union with diverse coverage and membership turnover of around 30% per year:
  • Teacher aides (25%), Cleaners (20%), Hospitality (14%), manufacturing (10%) child care (7%), ambulance officers (7%).
• Three distinct periods:
Union Density in Queensland and Australia, 1912 to 2012.

Red = Australia
Blue = Queensland
The causes of union decline in Australia.

- Structural changes.
- The demise of compulsory conciliation and arbitration.
- Introduction of more precarious forms of employment.
- The end of closed shops.
- The changed employer and government attitude toward unions.
The “organising approach” as a solution to union decline?

What is it?

- Fiorito (2004), “mobilizing current members and the unorganised to serve their collective interests rather than relying on paid union staff.”
- Often defined as a contrast to the servicing approach (Carter & Cooper 2002; Cregan, Bartram & Stanton 2009; de Turberville 2007; Muehelenkamp 1991; Peetz, Pocock & Houghton 2007).
- Issues with the organising approach:
  - Bowden (2010).
  - Simms & Holgate (2010).
  - de Turberville (2007).
The transformation of United Voice.

- **Cronulla conference 1998.**
  - Acceptance of the existence of a crisis.
  - Recognised the need to build a more activist union.

- **Organisational change 2003–2006.**
  - Specialisation and micromanagement.
  - Separation of organising and servicing.
  - Resourcing.
  - External leverage and Weil’s strategic choice framework.

- **Three distinct approaches within the union, 2012.**
  - Targeted recruitment campaigns.
  - Delegate development.
  - Member support.
The Campaigns:

- **Cleanstart**
  - The application of the Justice for Janitors approach in an Australian/New Zealand context.
  - Demonstrates the strong links between United Voice, the SFWU in New Zealand and the SEIU.
  - Described as a fundamental shift in the way the union operates.
  - Militant minority mobilisation strategy.

- **Bigsteps**
  - A national campaign focusing on the child care industry.
  - The stated objective of the campaign is for the federal government to commit an extra $1.4 Billion/year.
  - Committee building strategy.
How to measure the effectiveness of the United Voice approach?

- How to measure union effectiveness?
  - Aggregate union membership on its own

- From the interviews:
  - Activism.
  - Workplace leadership.
  - Membership.
  - Power.

- Two surveys:
  - Rank and file.
  - Delegates.