Gender Equality Bargaining: A key to union revitalisation and modernisation

27 October 2012

Dr Sue Williamson
Unions and Women: What’s the problem?

› Male breadwinner model of work/unionism

› ‘...masculinist nature of Australian unions...created significant negative legacies for working women...which partly explain(s) Australia’s laggardly work and family regime’ (Pocock and Brown, 2009, 160).

› Bargaining agendas reflect male needs

› Trading off gender equality items in collective bargaining

› Potential for gender equality bargaining for union renewal and modernisation
Colling and Dickens (1998) – multi-pronged concept of equality bargaining:

- ‘...encompasses the collective negotiation of provisions that are of particular interest or benefit to women and/or are likely to facilitate gender equality (‘special measures’); equality awareness on the part of negotiators in handling commonplace bargaining agenda items such as pay and pay opportunities (‘gender-proofing’), and the injection of an equality dimension (specifically, addressing gender disadvantage) to the negotiation of change, for example reforming a grading structure’ (1998, 390).

Research questions: Did a form of equality bargaining occur in the case study negotiations? If so, what were the facilitating factors?

- Can equality bargaining be used for union revitalisation?
Methodology

› Interviews undertaken from March 2008-September 2010
› 3 case studies (from 6)
› 65 interviews, plus observations
  - Mostly with union negotiators
  - As the negotiations progressed – little used data collection method
› Also document analysis

› And a brief word about the Australian context
  - Development of a PPL scheme 2008-09
  - IR environment - importance of collective bargaining
NSW Nurses Ass & HospitalOrg (Private hospital)
- Private hospitals with multiple workplaces.
- High level member engagement – had modernised in response to hostile union environment
- Union pressure tactics during negotiations
- Main claim: increased quantum of ppl.

Outcomes: PPL included in agreement
  - Discussions to reopen during life of agreement
  - Status quo of membership numbers and engagement, however may assist in fulfilling aim of attracting younger members and graduates
LHMU/SecurityInc (Detention centre)

› Several worksites across Australia, male dominated, some responsibility.
› Privately owned, provided detention services to the Australian government.
› Moderate level member engagement
› High trust bargaining relationship
› Ppl main family provision claim
› Delegates resistant to gender equality bargaining

Outcomes: 6 weeks paid maternity leave

: No increases to union membership or engagement, but increased level of education about gender equality bargaining
CPSU/PublicOrg (Public service)

› Large female dominated APS agency.
› Low-trust relationship.
› High level member engagement – had modernised to increase relevance to members
› Collective action undertaken to support claim
› Wide range of claims: increased ppl, broader carer’s leave, pay parity

Outcomes: Wages reclassified

  : Increased PPL
  : Wider use of carer’s leave
  : Increased member involvement, increased membership numbers
Facilitative Factors

**National Level**
- Development of ppl scheme

**Industry Level (ie union wide)**
- Union leadership
- Campaigning
- Increased member involvement
- Core claim; gender mainstreaming of claim; given high priority
- Industry benchmarks
- Business case

**Organisational Level**
- Convergence of interests
- Pragmatic or good relationship
- Leadership between the negotiators
- Experienced negotiators
Revitalising and Moderning Unions through Gender Equality Bargaining

Back to Colling and Dicken’s definition:

- 1. Negotiating special measures
  - All unions negotiated for a gender equality provision, did increase union member involvement

- 2. Gender proofing
  - Limited evidence – CPSU negotiated additional gender equality provisions, limited impact however

- 3. Negotiating change
  - Limited evidence – CPSU negotiated for pay parity – potential to attract new members

Conclusions

Gender equality bargaining has potential to revitalise and modernise unions, however, has yet to be fully utilised.