

1. DETAILS

Candidate	[Student name]
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Colloquia	First year confirmation
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2. OBJECTIVE

This thesis aims to investigate the interplay between globalisation, technology and trade unions. The principal aim of this dissertation is to examine the effect of globalisation and technology on trade unions in Australia and their ability to respond to these changes over the last two decades. In the process the thesis seeks to model a revitalised form of union internationalism, made possible by new forms of technology and communication, as the most effective response to the challenges posed by globalisation and technology.

3. RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

3.1 Background

Over the past two decades there have been rapid advances in computer technology, most significantly in the form of the internet. Relatively low cost, high speed communication via networked computers has become an everyday reality for the greater majority of people in the developed world. The period has also witnessed a marked growth in the level of global trade. Under the mantle of globalisation multinational corporations have increased in size and economic might to such an extent that their respective sales revenues now rival those of many nation states. Weakened by a declining membership and an array of restrictive statutes, the

Australian trade union movement has found itself confronted by an increasingly networked and globalised environment in which it must operate (Peetz 1998). Taking their cues from various social movements, a growing number of unionists in Australia (Australian Council of Trade Unions 2000; Lewis 2002) and internationally (Shostak 1999; Shostak 2002) have come to view the internet and email as integral aspects of campaigning and organising workers today. This has been particularly significant in relation to solidarity campaigns between unionists in different countries and the internet has been credited with revitalising worker internationalism (Waterman 1992; Lee 1997; Lee 1999; Hodkinson 2001; Munck 2002).

3.2 Significance

The political implications of email and the internet is the subject of an ever growing body of work. While there have been a number studies on the instrumental use parliamentary parties have made of the internet for electioneering (Grossmann 1995; Alexander and Pal 1998; Hoff, Horrocks and Tops 2000; Margolis and Resnick 2000, Kamark and Nye 2002) the overwhelming emphasis of the literature has been on social movements as networks that work and exist because of networked computers (Castells 1996; Meikle 2002; Goodman and Ranald 2000; Scalner 2002; McCaughley and Ayers 2003; Van de Donk et al. 2004). Through their apparent structurelessness, modern day social movements have come to mirror the organisation of online networks. Internationally, scholars of internet activism have tended to ignore the union movement and it has been left for union activists to document their internet campaigns (Lee 1997; Lee 1999; Shostak 1999; Shostak 2002). In Australia, there have been case studies of union internet usage during the 1998 Patrick's Dispute (Vandenberg 2001) and as part of the international campaign against the mining company Rio Tinto (Walker 2001) however a more comprehensive and contemporary study is needed. This project seeks to fill that gap in the literature.

3.3 Rationale

More broadly, the project examines the effects of globalisation and technology on the Australian labour movement over the past three decades, and the movement's ability to respond to these changes. The project explores the ways in which globalisation and technology have limited the effectiveness of the union movement's traditional industrial and political tactics and seeks to ascertain the role of emails and the internet in overcoming these problems. In ascertaining the role of computer mediated communication within contemporary unionism in overcoming the obstacles it faces,

the project has serious and practical applications for the project's Industry Partner, the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Australian union movement more widely. Drawing attention to campaigns in which unions have communicated successfully both internally and externally via the internet and email allows other unions to learn about the organisational, political and industrial implications of networked computers. Conversely, illustrating the limitations of such technology in particular circumstances may prevent unions from placing too great an emphasis of their internet strategy at the cost of other campaigning methods.

4.1 Theoretical framework

As part of this project it is necessary to set out a conceptual framework, particularly in relation to the key concepts of globalisation and technology. Given the diverse and highly contested understandings of both technology (Winner 1977; Green and Guinery 1994; Barry 2001) and globalisation (Ohmae 1995; Held et al 1999, Hirst and Thompson 1999; Amoore et al 2000; Scholte 2000) this task is not as straight forward as it initially appears. What are common to both globalisation and technology are their 'spatial-temporal' effects on social, political and economic activities (Held et al. 2000: 15-6) and the conflict between agency and determinism found in both debates.

Given that the principal aim of the project is on the effect of globalisation and technology on trade unions in Australia, the theoretical framework will centre around the impact of these forces on that the nature of work (Rifkin 1995; Castells 1996; Meiksins 1996; Menzies 1996; Dawson and Foster 1996; Aronowitz and Cutler 1998; Andresky 2000). The thesis will engage with debates around changes in the systems of production commonly referred to as fordism and post-fordism, the role of new technology in this change and the effect of the changes from fordist to post-fordist systems of production on work organisation and industrial relations with particular reference to the work of the French Regulation School (Aglietta 1979; De Vroey 1984; Curry 1993; Jessop 1988; Jessop 2001; More particularly, the thesis will examine the work of John Mathews and his arguments about trade unions, technological change and post-fordist systems of production (Mathews 1985; 1987; 1988; 1989a; 1989b; 1992; Badham and Mathews 1989), those of his supporters in the union movement (Carmichael 1988; 1989) as well as those of his critics in Australia (Campbell 1990; Gahan 1991; Hindess 1990; Hampson 1991; Fieldes and Bramble 1992; Hampson, Ewer and Smith 1994).

4. Method

The thesis would utilise a number of specific knowledge gathering techniques. There would be a historical consideration of shifts that have occurred over the last twenty years. A number of case studies focussing on industrial disputes involving globalisation and technology will be examined and compared. Given that strategies deployed by employers, workers and unions develop during disputes, focussing on the dynamics, outcomes, and arenas of conflict is an important method for drawing general lessons from the case studies. Interviews with a number of union officials, rank and file members and other people with expertise in the area will be another method of collecting information for the thesis. There would also be extensive use made of statistical information relating to networked computer usage and trade unions. If particular conflicts have generated website and email messages that have been archived, textual analysis of patterns of communication during conflicts will take place.

5. Thesis Outline

This thesis investigates the interplay between globalisation, technology and trade unions. The thesis identifies a revitalised form of union internationalism that has emerged along with new forms of technology and communication and offers the most effective response to the challenges posed by globalisation and technology.

This investigation is undertaken in four stages spread over five chapters. Firstly, the thesis examines the way unions have conceptualised and engaged with globalisation, technological change and the effects they have had on the employment, wages and conditions of the union movement's core constituency: its membership. In considering the historical shifts that have occurred over the last twenty years, it is argued that the movement's reliance on the Australian State as a bulwark against global trade has left unions ill-equipped to deal with the increasingly mobile nature of capital. Furthermore, notions that the development of technology remains a management prerogative from which trade unions and industrial courts are excluded and trade union's tendency to react against technological change after the fact has prevented unions from having real input into the development and utilisation of technology in Australian workplaces.

The thesis investigates the impact of technological change on the nature of work and the manner in which unions operate at the workplace level taking up Edwards' notion that the workplace is a 'contested terrain' between workers and management. Through exploring disputes concerning the utilisation of network

technology for both workplace surveillance and union recruitment and organising the dissertation seeks to confront utopian and dystopian visions of networked technology at the workplace level.

Thirdly the thesis takes up the union movement's ability to influence public opinion and policy formation via networked technology. More specifically, it examines the role e-mail and the Internet play in union campaigns opposing the Free Trade Agreement and seeking to improve the pay and conditions of childcare workers. The dissertation argues that while e-mail and websites are useful mediums for getting the union movement's message out, their utility in influencing policy formation is dependent upon wider social and political networks.

Fourthly, the dissertation examines the effect networked technology has had on union internationalism. Utilising case studies of international campaigns around Rio Tinto and the Sydney Hilton Hotel, the thesis makes the case that e-mail and the Internet have revitalised union internationalism. It is also argued that online international campaigns face considerable limitations and their success is rarely assured.

In investigating the effect of globalisation and technology on Australian trade unions the dissertation reveals the dynamic and contradictory nature of globalisation and technology. Technology that allows employers to place their workers under constant surveillance provides avenues for workers' self organisation. Similarly networked computers which have facilitated the even freer flow of global capital have also provided a vehicle for greater union internationalism.

Introduction

The introduction sets out the problems and the inquiry of the thesis. It discusses the Australian trade union movement, its development and its role in the industrial relations and political system. It then goes on to discuss globalisation and technology with an emphasis on the role that determinism whether technological or global and agency have played in the various debates.

Key research questions

How have globalisation and technological change affected the organisation and nature of work in Australia? What effect have globalisation and technology had on Australian trade unions?

Background and possible hypothesis

Globalisation and technology have been significant factors in the shifts in work organisation and practice that have taken place in Australia over the last thirty years. The introduction will address the notion of technology as an instrument versus technology as a discourse (Poster 1990; Barney 2000; Laison 2003) as well as the political or anti-political nature of technology (Barry 2001). Changes in the industrial relations policies and institutions in Australia have restricted the ability of unions to respond constructively to and even counter the challenges posed by globalisation and technology. One hypothesis is that globalisation and technology have themselves negated the effectiveness of unions' traditional industrial and political tactics.

Chapter One: Unions and Globalisation

Statement of Problem

Unions and globalisation

Key research questions

What is globalisation? How has globalisation affected the way in which workplaces operate? How have Australian unions understood and responded to globalisation?

Background and Possible hypotheses

Globalisation has a range of meanings, in relation to trade unions it refers to the manner in which global capital has become increasingly free from the nation state both in terms of being bound by specific laws and regulations that may govern corporate behaviour and in the location of production. Historically, the Australian union movement has regarded the state as a bulwark against global capital. It is proposed to investigate whether this strategy has left Australian unions ill equipped to deal with the increasingly mobile nature of global capital and the effect of its increasing mobility on the workforce.

Chapter Two: Unions and technological change in Australia

Statement of Problem

Unions and technological change in Australia

Key research questions

What role have Australian trade unions played in relation to the adoption of new technology in Australian workplaces in the period 1978 to 1996? What role have employers, courts and governments played in determining trade union responses to technological change been determined by employers, courts and governments? To what extent has management prerogative prevented unions and workers from having an input into the selection and adoption of new technology?

Background and Possible hypotheses

Contemporary debate over the role of unions in relation to technological change, what little there is, is framed and informed by the experiences of unions in the period 1978 to 1996. This period witnessed not only significant levels of technological change but also the struggle involving unions, employers, industrial courts and governments over the nature and extent of the role that trade unions should play in relation to the introduction and use of new technology. While trade unions and industrial courts have sought to challenge and proscribe the limits of management prerogative, as an ideology and legal principle it has prevented unions and workers from having a real voice in the development and utilisation of technology in Australian workplaces.

Chapter Three: Unions and the Workplace

Statement of Problem

The changing nature of work and the operation of unions at the workplace level.

Key research questions

How have workplaces and the nature of work changed over the last twenty years?

How has networked technology effected the nature of work? Could networked technology be used to assist workers to organise in their workplaces?

Background and possible hypothesis

There have been significant changes in the way workplaces are organised and the way work is done. The last twenty years have seen the diminution and exclusion of unions from workplaces and the de-collectivisation of the employment relationship. Networked technology has facilitated work intensification and workplace surveillance, especially in clerical or white-collar workplaces. It is proposed to investigate the notion that networked technology can be transformed from a means of workplace control into a vehicle for worker self-organisation.

Case Study

E-mail and web usage – sackings over Internet and e-mail misuse

This case study investigates everyday issues faced by workers and unions in terms of workplace surveillance and disciplinary processes. E-mail has been utilised as a tool of work intensification and the computer technology allows employers to monitor their employees e-mail correspondence and the websites they visit. A number of employers have taken disciplinary action, including dismissal, against workers for misusing company e-mail system. Most commonly this e-mail misuse has taken the form of offensive or pornographic material. This issue feeds into wider concerns

about workplace surveillance and workers' rights to privacy. Increasingly unions, employers and workers have been required to renegotiate the boundaries between personal and public space.

E-mail and web usage – Union access to company e-mail during enterprise bargaining

This conflict over union access to company wide e-mail is in an example of workers turning a device of work intensification and surveillance into a means for rebuilding collective organisation at the workplace level. The dispute at Channel 7 reflects attempts by workers to forge a sense of collectivity and the wider struggle between workers and management for dominance in the workplace. E-mail's importance as a vehicle for union organising and communicating the union's message to workers in a workplace is demonstrated by the significance attached to it by both the union, in this instance the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, and Channel 7 management. The dispute also demonstrates the role of the state, in this instance the Industrial Relations Commission, in mediating and codifying such disputes.

Chapter Four: Unions, Australian Politics, the State and the Community

Statement of Problem

How do unions get their voice heard in the political system and the wider community?

Key research questions

How have trade unions traditionally influenced policy and opinion? How has this influence declined? What are the reasons for this declining influence? What can trade unions do to arrest or reverse this process?

Background and possible hypotheses

The last twenty years have seen a significant decline in the union movement's ability to influence public policy and opinion. Traditionally, unions have utilised their legal and industrial muscle as well as their connections with the Australian Labor Party to influence public opinion and policy formation. Shifts in the union – Labor party dynamic and declining union densities have reduced the union movement's influence on policy makers and public opinion. One hypothesis that the thesis will analyse is that the effectiveness of networked computers in shaping national opinion is dependent on the extent to which unions are able to tap into wider networks in the community.

Case Studies

Campaign to improve wages and conditions for childcare workers 2003 – 2004

Throughout the course of 2003 and 2004 the Australian Services Union (ASU) and the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union (LHMU) have been campaigning to improve the wages and conditions of childcare workers. While this has principally revolved around the legal strategy of so-called 'work value' cases in the industrial courts, the campaigns have had a political focus. Utilising the Internet and e-mail the unions have sought to highlight the importance of the work done by childcare workers and connect the matter to wider community debates about work and family. This campaign has a far degree of success with the Labor Party committing itself to improving the wages of childcare workers as part of the work and family policy it took to the 2004 Federal Election.

Campaign against the Free Trade Agreement 2003 – 2004

This case study considers the campaign by the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) against the signing of the Free Trade Agreement between Australia and the United States. The AMWU is the principal manufacturing union and one of the wealthiest and most powerful unions in the country. Though its national secretary Doug Cameron, the AMWU has been a strong advocate of 'fair trade not free trade' and this has brought the union into conflict with sections of the parliamentary Labor Party committed to free trade. This was most apparent in 2004 in relation to the question of Labor Party's support for the Free Trade Agreement that would be necessary for it to pass through the Senate. The AMWU made extensive use of the Internet and e-mail in order to garner public support for its opposition to the Free Trade Agreement but also to pressure the Labor Party into opposing the Agreement. This strategy was ultimately unsuccessful. These case studies aim to shed light on the way the AMWU and the childcare unions have used the Internet and e-mail to garner public support and put issues on the political agenda. Arguably, the issue of childcare links more readily into wider parent based community networks than the free trade versus fair trade.

Chapter Five: Union Internationalism

Statement of Problem

Union internationalism as a response to globalisation

Key research questions

What types of international coordinated union action have occurred? How have networked computers contributed to these international union actions?

Background and possible hypotheses

Across the globe union activists have conducted a series of campaign targeting multinational companies and international economic institutions. Networked computers have facilitated rapid and inexpensive communication between unionists and enabled them to share information and coordinate international campaigns. One hypothesis that the thesis will examine is that international campaigns by unions have been the most effective strategy of combating global capital.

Case Studies

International Campaign against Rio Tinto: 1998 to the present

The international campaign by a range of unions against the multinational Rio Tinto over its attempts to de-collectivise and de-unionise its Australian workforce has involved extensive use of the Internet and e-mail. Given Rio Tinto's multinational status and its hardline anti-union stance internationally, a campaign limited to Australia would have had limited success. Through the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Worker's Union (ICEM), a range of mining unions including the Australian Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) have come together and worked in with environmental and indigenous rights activists to confront Rio Tinto. Most notably, unions have cooperated with shareholder activists and even some institutional shareholders to change Rio Tinto's industrial relations policies at the company's annual general meetings. The Internet and e-mail have been central to the unions' campaign against Rio Tinto in Australia and internationally.

International campaign – Sydney Hilton Hotel 2002-2003

In 2002 the Sydney Hilton Hotel decided it was going to close for renovations in the process making hundreds of its employees redundant. The focus of the campaign was to secure redundancy packages for the workers more generous than the legal requirement of 8 weeks for more than five years service. Through its website the Liquor Hospitality Miscellaneous Workers' Union (LHMU) sought to put pressure on the Hilton Hotel, which is part of the international chain of hotels. The website drew in international support from around the world from unionists and non-unionists. People visiting the LHMU website were encouraged to e-mail the company with protest e-mails. E-mailed messages of support for the workers at the hotel also appeared on the website. This case study aims to shed light on the strategy of 'naming and shaming' companies for their industrial practises. It is arguable that this

strategy was a significant aspect of the LHMU's overall campaign to achieve better entitlements for the workers concerned.

Conclusion

The conclusion draws the various threads of the argument together. It discusses the extent to which the Australian trade union movement has responded to the challenges posed by globalisation and technology. The conclusion would also engage with the notion that union strategies and organisation needs to change in order to fully realise the potential of networked computers in union renewal.

Key research questions

Have Australian unions developed an effective response to globalisation and technology? Is networked technology the solution to the problems facing the Australian trade union movement? Does the full utilisation of networked computers require changes in the way unions operate and are organised?

Background and possible hypothesis

Networked technology will not solve all the problems faced by the union movement. However it contains within it great potential to increase the presence and reach of the union movement in Australia. As the American labour economist Richard B Freeman noted: 'employee organisations will prosper in cyberspace because the Internet is the bridging technology between an increasingly heterogeneous work force and individualistic workers and the collective activity and solidarity that lie at the heart of trade unionism' (Taylor 2001). In order to utilise networked technology to its full potential it is necessary for unions to integrate it into their campaign and renewal strategies. One hypothesis is that in order to fully realise the benefits of network technology, unions must change the manner in which they operate and are organised; embracing in the process so-called e-union (Freeman 2003) or Cyberunion (Shostak 2002a and 2002b) models of union organisation.

6. Schedule

Action	Date of Meeting	Proposed date	Actual Date
Commence reading in relation to the themes of union decline and technology	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy
Give thesis a title and commence work on a review of the literature relating to union decline	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy
Submit literature review. Organise chapters of thesis and incorporate technology into them	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy
Sharpen arguments of introduction of thesis outline and commence work on proposal	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy

Continue work on proposal and continue reading. Think about argument.	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy
Work on a thesis abstract including aims and method	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy
Work out thesis's theoretical, methodological basis.	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy
Re-shape aims and goals of thesis outline and integrate case studies. Sharpen nature of the problem under discussion.	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy
Submit a draft of a chapter on technological change	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	11/06/04
Revise draft of chapter. Bring in wider perspective around issues of technological change. Draw out link with industrial democracy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy
Revise chapter and rewrite in the form of a paper to be delivered at school seminar	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy
Revise paper, placing greater emphasis on technological and economic determinism found in manner in which new technology has been introduced.	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy
Further redrafting of seminar paper, incorporate power point presentation	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy
Deliver seminar paper on Unions and technological change in Australia 1978 – 1996	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy
Work on Colloquia	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	
Commence work on Chapter One	dd/mm/yy	dd/mm/yy	
Colloquia		dd/mm/yy	
Submit draft of Chapter One		dd/mm/yy	
Commence work on Chapter Three		mm/yy	
Draft and submit application for ethics clearance		mm/yy	
Ethics clearance meeting		mm/yy	
Submit Chapter Three		mm/yy	
Commence work on Chapter Four		mm/yy	
Submit draft of Chapter Four		mm/yy	
Commence work on Chapter Five		mm/yy	
Submit draft of Chapter Five		mm/yy	
Commence work on introduction		mm/yy	
Submit introduction		mm/yy	
Commence work on conclusion		mm/yy	
Submit draft of conclusion		mm/yy	
Revise and resubmit sections as necessary		mm/yy	
Submit final thesis		mm/yy	

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Chapter Two: Unions and technological change in Australia 1978 – 1996

Introduction

Technological change is amongst the most significant forms of change at the workplace level. The selection, introduction and adoption of new technology has historically effected types of employment, levels of skill, rates of pay, hours worked, union density, numbers of employees and the types of work carried out in a particular workplace. Given the scope of its impact upon the nature of work and work organisation, technological change could be regarded as a key issue for trade unions, as representatives and advocates of working people. The nature and effect of technological change has elicited an array of responses from trade unions that vary from outright opposition to uncritical acceptance. The choice of responses available to trade unions has been determined in part by employers, governments and the legal

system. Internationally, Sorge and Streeck (1988:19-20) note that technological change or 'technical change' has traditionally been regarded as something external to and independent of industrial relations,

Industrial relations, both in theory and in practise, become limited to the implementation of (managerial strategies of) technical change and appear to have nothing to do with its conception (Sorge and Streeck 1988:19-20).

This notion that selection and implementation of new technology is a management prerogative beyond the realm of industrial relations has been central in restricting the range of options available open to unions and workers. Sorge and Streeck argue that trade unions have contributed to this situation through their willingness to limit themselves to negotiating wages and conditions and only dealing with questions of technology when it impacts upon these core concerns (Sorge and Streeck 1988:20). Contrary to this position, Markmann posits that under free market capitalism the relationship between labour and capital is one of 'compulsory symbiosis' from which unions cannot simply opt out of. He argues that under this symbiotic relationship, management has the upper hand as it has total discretion in relation to investment decisions as well as the ultimate decision in relation to employment and dismissal (Markmann 1985:141). In order to contest the notion of technology as a management prerogative and pursue their 'core concerns', Australian unions have focussed their efforts on guaranteeing that in the event of technological change workers and their unions are notified and kept informed of the new technology to be used and the likely effects of this new technology. The right to actively and genuinely participate in the selection and adoption of new technology, a right unions in Scandinavia have enjoyed for almost 30 years, has been something most Australian unions could only aspire to.

In studies of technological change in Canada and Western Europe, several authors noted an absence of union resistance to the high level of technological change that occurred in industrialised western nations in the 30 years that followed the Second World War. This they attributed to the period being one of economic growth and higher living standards for workers through out the industrialised west, Australia included (Henwood and Wyatt 1987:395-6; Markmann 1985:141). A number of Australian authors have argued that in this period of high employment and a buoyant economy, Australian unions had little interest in intervening over the question of technological change, as workers made redundant by the introduction of labour saving

technology were generally reabsorbed into the workforce (Deery 1982:155-6; Wooden and Kriegler 1985:24; Lansbury and Davis 1984: 7). The rapid growth in unemployment in the latter half of the 1970s, from 4.5% in 1975 to 6% in 1979, combined with the introduction of labour saving technologies in a range of industries forced unions to rethink their attitudes to the introduction of new technology and its impact upon the workforce (Mathews 1985:59).

A notable exception to the apparent disinterest of unions in the effects of technological change prior to the late 1970s, was the Waterside Workers Federation's (WWF) involvement in an agreement covering the introduction of containerisation to the Australian waterfront in the mid-1960s. The shift from manual loading of ships to crane loaded containers required far fewer workers and a desire to protect stevedoring jobs led the WWF to oppose introduction of mechanisation on the Australian waterfront. Having considered the Mechanisation and Modernisation Agreement, which the International Longshore and Warehouse Union negotiated with American Stevedoring Employers in the early 1960s, the leadership of the WWF quickly recognised that containerisation was inevitable and that a similar agreement covering the introduction of the new technology was necessary in order to secure the best outcome for Australian waterside workers (Bull 1998:105). In 1965, in pursuit of series of demands, which included job security for waterside workers, a pension scheme and a mechanisation fund, WWF members embarked on a campaign of intensified industrial action. (Lowenstein and Hills 1982:168-9) In the a three month period between July and September 1965 some 561,000 hours were lost through unauthorised fortnightly stoppages. Having enacted legislation which threatened the WWF with deregistration unless the industrial action ceased, the Federal Government convened the National Stevedoring Industry Conference, composed of the WWF, Stevedoring employers, the ACTU and itself in October 1965 (Derry 1978:207). After eighteen months of negotiations the parties reached an agreement which provided for decasualisation of waterfront employment and improved redundancy payments in return for the union's complete acceptance of the new technology. While companies retained the right to make forced redundancies under the national stevedoring industry agreement, the union won a 'no compulsory redundancy' clause in the stevedoring award in 1972 (Derry 1982:170). The introduction of containerisation on Australian waterfront led to a dramatic decline in the size of the waterfront workforce, in the space of a decade years the number of stevedores was

halved from 20,000 in 1967 to approximately 10,000 in 1977 (Sheridan 1994:263; Deery 1978:216). By taking the initiative on the question of containerisation combined with the militancy and strategic location in the Australian economy of its members, the WWF was able to challenge management prerogative in relation to the introduction of new technology and secure greater job security and redundancy entitlements for its members. In the 1970s it was another union, the Australian Telecommunications Employees Association, which challenged management prerogative through a similar combination of initiative and innovative thinking.

The 1978 computer exchange technology dispute between Telecom and the Australian Telecommunications Employees Association (ATEA) was one of several industrial disputes in a series of industries over the question of new technology that occurred during the latter half of the 1970s. However it is a highly significant dispute because it was one of the most important challenges to the sanctity of management prerogative in relation to the selection and application of new technology. The dispute also involved the innovative use made by a union of its members' skills and their ability to take effective industrial action, the ATEA representing skilled technicians employed in Telecom. In 1977 Telecom sought to introduce the ARE 11 computer controlled exchanges into the telephone network and announced that in order to maintain the 'integrity' of new technology it was necessary to centralise the maintenance functions in 'Exchange Maintenance Centres' (EMCs). The ATEA did not oppose the introduction of ARE 11 technology, rather it was opposed to the changes in work organisation that Telecom management had stated were necessary in order to properly maintain the new technology over the introduction of computerised exchange technology in 1978 (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations 1985:165-6). The ATEA's response to Telecom's technological and organisational proposals was to put forward an alternative proposal in the form of decentralised 'Exchange Support Centres' (ESC), using the ARE 11 technology but designed to retain technical staff and maintain their level of skill. Telecom rejected this proposal and a four-week national strike of technicians resulted.

If the proposal of a workable alternative reflected an innovative response to technological change on the part of the ATEA, then the arbiter's solution to dispute was little short of ground breaking. The matter went before Mary Gaudron, at the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, who came up with a proposal to solve the dispute, to which both parties agreed. The EMC and ESC systems of

organisation were to be trialled simultaneously for a period of eighteen months (Mathews 1985:43-4). The trials concluded in June 1980 and were then evaluated by two independent experts: Professor Karbowiak chosen by Telecom and Peter Robson, by the various telecommunication unions. The two systems were evaluated on the basis of six criteria: efficiency of operation, standard of service achieved, job satisfaction, and maintenance of technical standards and retention of expertise, career opportunities and the public interest. The reports of the findings were then to be given to the Commission, which would make a decision. Robson found that ESC system was superior to the EMC system on all criteria (Derry 1982:172). Ultimately, Telecom chose a three-tiered system of maintenance in preference to EMC and ESC (Mathews 1985:45). More importantly the dispute challenged management prerogative in relation to technology and work organisation and established the notion that unions possessed the knowledge and competence to take part in processes surrounding changes to technology and work organisation. The dispute and the trial of the two systems challenged the technological determinism of Telecom management. The superiority of the ATEA developed system of maintenance demonstrated that there was no inherent requirement in the ARE 11 technology that necessitated the centralisation of Telecom's exchange maintenance systems. In relation to the dispute, Tacy and Gough (1984:141) noted

If a conventional approach to work organisation is adopted based on job simplification and fragmentation and centralisation of control, it is by choice and not an automatic consequence of new technology.

The dispute at Telecom and wider concerns amongst unions over the effects that new technology was having on the employment and conditions of their members placed technological change firmly on the union movement's agenda. The result was the adoption and amendment of a technological change policy at 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981 and 1983 ACTU Congresses. While fears that the new labour saving devices would increase unemployment, led some officials to advocate a five year moratorium on 'technological innovations involving job-displacement' (Martin 1979:490-1), the main focus of the technological change policy revolved around notification of proposed change, union involvement in the selection and implementation of appropriate technology in such a way that maximised the benefits for workers and the community and minimised the costs of such technology's introduction (Mathews

1985:54; Lansbury and Davis 1984:235).¹ The policy called on governments to create legislation which would require employers to prepare ‘Technological Impact Statements’: outlining the objectives of the technological change, any alternatives, the effect on the workplace and on the overall levels of unemployment and the costs to the community and employees of any redundancies stemming from the change (Lansbury and Davis 1984:237-8). The technological change policy also promoted the establishment of a ‘tripartite committee with adequate full-time facilities’ that would consider all aspects of technological change and called for increased severance payments for works made redundant as the result of technological change (Lansbury and Davis 1984:238). The policy advocated that unions challenge management prerogative in relation to the introduction of new technology through either award prescription, legislation or agreement that placed obligations on employers to consult and negotiate on ‘various issues arising from technological change’ (Lansbury and Davis 1984:237). The importance placed on the need for unions to be informed and consulted in the event of technological change was underscored by the recommendation that in instances where employers failed to provide sufficient warning or information of their intentions, unions should not cooperate in the implementation of the new technology,

the centrality of the issue of job security and employment opportunities make the rights of information and consultation urgent industrial issues and we declare that where consultation and agreement is not available early enough for effective union intervention, a policy of non-cooperation must be pursued to protect the interests of employees (Lansbury and Davis 1984:235).

Writing in 1980, Riches noted that of the unions with a policy on consultation in relation to the introduction of new technology, which mirrored the ACTU’s, none had carried out the threat of non-cooperation (Riches 1980:206).

In line with the ACTU’s technological change policy, by the early 1980s a number of unions had negotiated agreements with employers dealing with the introduction of new technology. In the main such agreements dealt with the effects of technological change in the form of redundancies and retraining, however the ATEA maintained its role as a pacesetter with a comprehensive technology agreement that included information sharing. The agreement on ‘Consideration of the Introduction of

¹ In 1978 The Australian predicted that new technology would replace so many manufacturing and clerical jobs that by 1984 there would be an unemployment level of 31% (Mandeville and MacDonald 1980:214). A similar phenomenon occurred in Britain. Huws notes that a Headline in Guardian newspaper in September 1978 declared ‘Technology could put 5M out of work’ (Huws 2003:91).

Technological Change' involving Telecom, the ATEA and the other telecommunication and clerical unions, was signed in April 1980. The agreement came out of the union-management Telecom Consultative Council and was part of the settlement of the 1978 dispute discussed earlier. The document provided for information sharing from the contemplative stage and joint consideration of any proposed changes in technology, prior to any decision to adopt such changes. All parties were to acknowledge that technological change should only be adopted when there was 'demonstrable net benefit to the community' and Telecom was to provide unions with an economic analysis of the proposed changes indicating the full range of costs and benefits derived from the new technology (Mansfield 1981:155).

Assessment of the proposed changes was to take account of its effects on employment levels, the level of service to customers, availability of qualified staff, job satisfaction for Telecom workers as well as including standard technical and monetary considerations. Telecom undertook to provide unions with sufficient information to allow them to assess the effects of the proposed changes on the workforce and the timetable for the introduction of the new technology was also the subject of joint consideration (Mansfield 1981:155). The agreement did not deal with the question of job loss as a result of technological change however it did commit the company to adopt policies, which would lead to 'the creation of additional productive and economic jobs within Telecom and associated Australian industries' (Mathews 1985:72). Several Telecom unions, most notably the ATEA, had negotiated 'no redundancies through new technology' clauses in their awards. The agreement, renewed in 1983 with minor modifications did not give unions the right to determine the technology purchased, such decisions remained in the hands of management. The agreement established the right of unions to participate in the consultation process; however they were not bound by the decisions made in relation to the new technology chosen. Ultimately, the Telecom unions were free to oppose the introduction of the new technology, even if they had participated in the consultative process (Mathews 1985:70). The agreement challenged notions of management prerogative in that Telecom was required to share information, consider the full effects of technological change on Telecom employees and consult over the process of its introduction. As the assistant Federal Secretary of the ATEA noted,

In the past, prior to 1978, management had the view that in a range of areas connected with the introduction of new technology it had the sole prerogative to

decide how issues were determined. These issues included work organisation, the type of technology introduced and the speed of its introduction. In addition, management only provided limited amounts of information to its employees and their unions in the technology and its effects...We now have a sharing of information from the contemplative stage. The information to be provided to employees through their unions is quite extensive and management no longer regards issues such as the organisation of work as its prerogative (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations 1985: 167).

Mathews argued that in the longer term, the agreement created a situation where new technology was only introduced in Telecom in the event of a written agreement covering its impact, citing the memorandum of understanding over the introduction of so-called AXE switching equipment in metropolitan areas in 1982 and a similar agreement covering the introduction of the switching technology in rural areas in late 1984 (Mathews 1985:72). In 1986, the Telecom Consultative Committee noted the 'mutual satisfaction of management and unions' with the technological change agreement (Davis and Lansbury 1989:29).

The ACTU's technological change policy and the technology agreements negotiated by a number of unions were a reaction to the unwillingness of many employers to either consult or share information with employees and their unions over technological change. In spite of guidelines on the introduction of new technology being produced and distributed in 1969 and 1972 by the National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC), a tripartite body representing unions, employer organisations and the government; which recommended the need for greater consultation, many employers resisted employee participation and information sharing in relation to technological change (Tracy and Gough 1984:142). Ignorance of the NLAC recommendations was a contributing factor. A 1980 survey by the Victorian Chamber of Manufacturers asked participants whether they followed or were aware of the National Labour Advisory Council's guidelines relating to the introduction of technological change. Of the thirty-five firms surveyed, none had followed the council's recommendations and only two stated that they had actually read the recommendations (Mansfield 1981:152). National surveys revealed that employers had little propensity to inform or consult with unions and workers over technological change. In 1979 a national survey investigated the consultative processes in 165 companies that had undergone technological change in the five years between 1974 and 1979. It was found that in 27% of cases of technological change no information was provided and in 46% of cases information was provided but there was no

consultation of employees' opinions (Shannon and Hogan 1981:15). In only 9% of cases of technological change had there been a joint decision making process. A 1980 study by the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed that of twelve hundred companies reported as having introduced new technology between 1976 and 1979, only 5% of respondents stated that they had consulted with their employees and unions prior to introducing new technology (Deery 1986:69).

The unwillingness of employers to inform and consult with workers and unions over the introduction of new technology was compounded by the absence of a wider legislative framework that would compel employers to provide information about proposed technological change or create a basic entitlement for workers made redundant as a consequence of major changes in technology. Australian workplaces were governed by national and state based industrial relations legislation. Prior to the Victorian Liberal Government's abolition of state based common law awards and referral of its industrial relations powers to the Federal Government on 1st March 1993, all states had their own industrial relations legislation and industrial tribunals. In 1964 and 1972 respectively, the New South Wales and South Australian Governments had introduced legislation that enabled state tribunals, upon application from the relevant union, to insert into state based awards or agreements clauses that provided for three months notice to employees made redundant through technological changes (Deery 1982:159). The Acts did not mean that workers in New South Wales were automatically entitled to three months notification. Indeed, in 1980 only 20% of New South Wales State awards, covering 30-35% of the workforce, contained the notification provision (Deery 1982:159).

At the federal level, the restricted jurisdiction of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission provisions and the wider unwillingness of the commission and High Court to infringe upon management prerogative meant that relating to redundancy and notification of technological change were largely absent. Under section 51 (xxxv) of the Constitution, the Federal government has the power to conciliate and arbitrate in order to prevent and settle industrial disputes 'extending beyond the limits of one state' (Australian Constitution para5 chap. 1). Under this constitutional authority and by way of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act, the Federal parliament had established the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration and vested it with the authority to deal with disputes over 'industrial matters' defined as those "pertaining to the relations between employers

and employees”(Derry et al 1985:166). However the Court, latter renamed Commission, had traditionally been reluctant to circumscribe managerial prerogative in relation to technological change. Henry Bournes Higgins, second president of the Court and justice of the High Court, encapsulated such sentiments in 1915 when he wrote:

The Court leaves every employer free to carry on the business on his own system, so long as he does not perpetuate industrial trouble or endanger industrial peace; free to choose his employees on their merits and according to his exigencies; free to make use of new machines, of improved methods...free to put the utmost pressure on anything and everything except human life (Higgins 1922:13).

There was also the question of whether the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission could legitimately hear and rule on issues such as technological change or redundancy. In several important decisions the High Court had on appeal ruled that particular matters did not directly relate to ‘relations between employers and employees’ and were therefore not industrial matters and lay beyond the Commission’s jurisdiction.

This notion of “management of an enterprise” being beyond the jurisdiction of the Federal Arbitration and Conciliation Commissions was challenged by the decision that came out of the test case on job security that the ACTU had lodged with the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission in June 1981, one of the concrete measures to come out of the ACTU’s technological change policy (Derry 1982: 169). The Termination, Redundancy and Change Decision 1984 established requirements covering the fairness of termination, redundancies and consultation with unions and workers in relation to major changes in a company’s structure, production methods or technology used. Where an employer had decided to make changes that would have a significant effect on employees, they were required to consult with the employees affected and their unions on the introduction and effect of such changes and measures to ameliorate or avoid any adverse effects of such changes (Deery 1986:74-5). The decision established a process of consultation in relation to redundancy as well as setting minimum standards of severance pay. Clauses dealing with redundancy and notification of change were subsequently incorporated into most federal awards. The termination change and redundancy decision was significant in terms of broadening the scope of issues covered under the Arbitration and Conciliation Commission’s jurisdiction. Nonetheless, the Commission had in a number of occasions, most notably

the 1968 Clerks (Oil Companies) Award decision, voiced the need for notification and consultation with employees and unions in relation to the introduction of technological change.

The union movement's legal challenge to management prerogative in relation to technological change was further strengthened by the High Court's decision in the Federated Clerks Union versus the Victorian Employers' Federation Case. In the Federated Clerks Union and others versus the Victorian Employers' Federation and others Case decision (1984) the High Court ruled that the Victorian Arbitration Commission had the authority to insert a clause concerning consultation in relation to technological change into the state based Commercial Clerks Award. The clause required that when an employer 'instructs, commissions or commences an investigation of the feasibility of technological change' they were to notify the Federated Clerks Union and any employees whose employment would be materially affected by such changes and inform them of 'the principal objectives of the investigation' (Derry et.al. 1985:168). During the investigation, the employer was to consult with the union in relation to the technological changes being investigated and furnish it with sufficient technical information as to allow the union to evaluate the likely effect of such technology on employment in that enterprise. In the event that the employer decided to implement the technological changes, the union and employees concerned were to be notified and informed of the likely effects on employment. They were also to be informed of any alternative proposals that might reduce or eliminate the material effects of such technological change (Derry et.al. 1985:168).

In comparison to the termination change and redundancy decision, the technological change clause in the Victorian Commercial Clerks Award provided for a more extensive consultation process especially in relation to the point at which employees and unions were to be informed of technological changes and the amount and type of information provided. Neither decision fundamentally challenged the ability of employers to select and introduce new technology. The termination, change and redundancy decision required management to notify the union and affected employees once it had made a definite decision to make the significant change. While employers were expected to give 'prompt consideration' to matters raised by workers and unions in relation to the changes, there was little scope for union involvement in the process (Derry et.al. 1985:168). Nor did the technological change clause in the Clerks Award facilitate any union participation in the decision making process in

relation to the introduction of new technology or the type of technology selected. Indeed, in the course of the High Court case, the Federated Clerks' Union had highlighted this point, arguing that the clause did not intrude on management prerogative and simply gave the union a voice in matters that had come about as a 'consequences of managerial decisions' (Deery 1986:76). Nor was there any provision in the award or decision enabling employees or their unions to veto the changes proposed by the management. In both decisions, unions were assigned ostensibly reactive roles in that their participation in the process of technological change was restricted to the effects of the changes in technology rather than participating in managing the process itself (Deery 1986:76).

While the termination, change and redundancy decision was a substantial legal victory for the union movement on the issue of consultation over workplace technological change, its impact was reinforced by changes in government policy on technological change brought about by the election of the Hawke government in 1983. The Fraser Government had responded to the Telecom Dispute by establishing the Committee of Inquiry into Technological Change in Australia in December 1978. The three person Committee involving Bill Mansfield, Federal Secretary of the ATEA, was chaired by Professor Rupert Myers and became known as the Myers Committee. The Committee's terms of reference were to 'examine, report and make recommendations on the process of technological change in Australian industry in order to maximise economic, social and other benefits and minimise any possible adverse consequences'. Delivering its report in April 1980, the Committee adopted a generally positive view of the effects of technological change. Amongst its 30 recommendations, the Committee recommended that the Federal Government run a test case on notification requirements in the event of technological change as well as a compensation scheme for workers made redundant through such change. While broadly welcoming the Myers Committee's report, the Fraser Government rejected the notification and compensation proposals. Taking up key recommendations of the Myers Committee and the ACTU's technological change policy, the ALP opposition undertook to support the establishment of the right for employees to be informed and consulted of intended technological change and the right to fair redundancy protection for workers and consultation with unions in the event of redundancies. Accordingly, the Hawke Government supported the ACTU's test case that led to the Termination, Change and redundancy decision. In addition, the

1983 Prices and Incomes Accord between the ALP and ACTU contained training and occupational health and safety provisions to deal with the effects of technological change. It also established industry level sectoral councils and the employer-union Economic Planning Advisory Council (EPAC) that was intended to advise government on planning procedures and policy.

In 1987 Ray Markey noted the significant shift with regard to Australian unions and technological change arguing that the changes in the 'politico-legal' context had moved the industrial relations system into a 'tripartite planning relationship' that in turn laid the groundwork for a neo-corporatist framework for broader economic management and planning (Markey 1987:146). The national conferences on technology and industrial democracy and employee participation held in the eighteen months following the election of the Hawke Government could be regarded as evidence of this. The objectives of the national technological conference included the role of technological change in economic development, ensuring consultation and encouraging innovation. While Mathews notes that the conference avoided any discussion of the social effects of technological change (Mathews 1985: 66), the draft national technology strategy that emerged from the conference included among its recommendations a need for consultation with unions and employees in the event of workplace based technological change (Markey 1987:150).

In the 1970s and 1980s discourse about workplace decision making or industrial democracy involving governments, academics, employers and unions ran parallel to and frequently overlapped with technological change not least of all because both involved a challenge to management's monopoly on the organisation of work. The ACTU had adopted a policy on Industrial Democracy at the 1977 Congress, subsequently revising the policy at successive congresses. The preamble to the policy stated that industrial democracy was concerned with equalising or redistributing power within the workplace. The policy's definition of industrial democracy included the notion that workers should have an increased say and influence in decision making within a workplace and that the trade union movement should 'no longer accept the concept of the master-servant relationship and the inequities that the master-servant relationship implies' (ACTU Policy on Industrial Democracy reproduced in Davis and Lansbury 1986:333-4). Industry democracy involved union influence at the enterprise, industry and national levels. The amended industrial policy adopted at the 1985 ACTU Congress stated that democracy in the

workplace should be enshrined in legislation and advanced by trade union's negotiating industrial democracy agreements based on a log of claims. This approach bore a striking similarity to the agreements covering the introduction of new technology. Such ideas challenged management prerogative and did little to endear the concept of industrial democracy to employers. Bryan Noakes from the Confederation of Australian Industry (CAI), an employer peak organisation, encapsulated such sentiments when he declared in his speech to the Industrial Democracy and Employee Participation Conference,

I have already said that 'industrial democracy' is a term which has never been embraced by employers. Largely this has been so because of its inherently political and ideological overtones and the fear that those who advocate it are essentially seeking radical social change involving the abrogation of property and ownership rights (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations 1985:20).

In contrast, employee participation was perceived as avoiding a direct challenge to management prerogative and sought to foster a greater sense of employee identification with the aims of the organisation.

The conference on Industrial Democracy and Employee Participation involving academics, employers and unionists, was opened by the Prime Minister who in his speech linked industrial democracy to national economic planning through bodies such as EPAC (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations 1985:6). Ralph Willis, then minister for employment and industrial relations, argued that industrial democracy was a way of harnessing people to the 'task of achieving economic recovery' and would improve worker productivity and flexibility (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations 1985:13). One of the central tenets of industrial democracy according to several speakers was the notion of information sharing and the tripartite National Labour Consultative Committee's Guidelines on Information Sharing were publicly released at the conference. Interestingly, the authors of the guidelines noted that while information sharing was a necessary precondition for industrial democracy and employee participation, in and of itself it was not sufficient 'to ensure a participative and democratic organisation' (National Labour Consultative Committee 1984:1).

The conference included a session devoted to industrial democracy and technological change. This panel included the manager of industrial negotiations division from Telecom and the assistant national secretary of the Australian

Telecommunications Employees' Association who both spoke about the Telecom consultative committee. In many ways the conference on Industrial Democracy and Employee participation reflected the tension between management prerogative and notions of workplace consultation and decision making. As Davis and Lansbury noted, 'employee participation' was included in the title of the conference because employers, and the Fraser Government, used the term in preference to industrial democracy (Davis and Lansbury 1996:2).

Inspired in part by the Industrial Democracy and Employee Participation Conference, research on industrial democracy and employee participation commissioned by the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations found that while several formal schemes for employee participation existed, rarely did these schemes give workers or their unions 'any significant influence on major decision making' (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations Working Environment Branch: 1986: 65). The commissioned work also found that 'there was a strong tendency of Australian management to defend its prerogatives' and that there was considerable management opposition to proposals that involved the real sharing of authority in the workplace (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations Working Environment Branch: 1986:65). The study also examined employee participation around technological change and found that in many industries surveyed unions had attempted to negotiate agreements and consultative processes. The research reported that in the vast majority of cases in the industries studied, new technology had been introduced without prior consultation, notification or the involvement of workers in research and development. The researchers also noted that the introduction of the new technology had reduced workers career prospects, fragmented work and led to deskilling. The lack of consultation had meant new technology was not utilised to its full potential (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations Working Environment Branch: 1986:67).

In spite of the gulf that existed between ideas of industrial democracy held by unions and the concept of employee participation advocated by employers, there was sufficient common ground for the ACTU and CAI to issue a joint statement on Participative Practices in April 1988. The statement included a section on 'Communication and Information Sharing' which reaffirmed the parties' commitment to the *Guidelines for Information Sharing*. It also included a section on 'New Technology and Management Practices' which acknowledged that new technology

and new work practises could provide for more interesting and skilled work, but that the new technology should only be introduced to improve productivity rather than eliminate jobs. The policy stressed the need for consultation and the ability of employees to influence the design of equipment and work organisation. It also called for decentralised and participatory work practices along with training and skills development (Confederation of Australian Industry and Australian Council of Trade Unions, “Joint Statement of Participative Practices” reproduced in Davis and Lansbury 1996:256-7).

The joint statement reflected the apparent progress achieved by the union movement around the issue of technological change. Many of the goals of the ACTU technological change policy had been achieved through the termination, change and redundancy decision. Union involvement in the Accord and the various tripartite bodies appeared to give unions greater influence over public policy relating technological change. Given that consultation and information sharing were central tenets of the ACTU’s policy, the apparent commitment of government and employers to such concepts could be read as something of a victory. As part of the tripartite process unions were expected to cooperate with employers in relation to workplace modernisation and rationalisation and to facilitate the introduction and application of new technology. Conversely such cooperation allowed unions to negotiate arrangements which minimised or protected workers from the effects of such technological change. Deery argues that a number of union officials, through their involvement on various tripartite bodies, accepted such a quid pro quo situation (Deery 1986:73). More significantly many people within the union movement shared the view that technology change and adoption of new forms of work organisation were prerequisites for Australia’s economic prosperity and central to the nation’s international competitiveness.

Beyond the mantra of international competitiveness, a number of figures within the union movement had come to see technological change as means of freeing workers from the regimentation of Taylorist work organisation. Reflecting their own experiences as well as the influence of writers such as Harry Braverman, many unionists hoped that the new technology and ‘post-Fordist’ forms of work organisation would create jobs that were more highly skilled, better paid, less monotonous and more participatory. Laurie Carmichael, then ACTU assistant secretary, summed up such sentiments when he declared,

The new technology makes possible a different kind of workforce, comprising fewer and fewer human robots, with multi-skilling replacing the infinite division of labour in order to handle efficiently and service real robots and highly automated multi-staged machines, processes and administration. A more highly skilled workforce is required, with a greater sophistication and inter-activeness of functions and work processes (Carmichael 1989:24).

Similarly, the ACTU policy on training and skill development adopted at the 1989 Congress noted that new technology and the need for 'world class enterprises' meant that significant change in work organisation, training and skill development were required and criticised what it saw as the Taylorist model of work organisation and management as being fundamentally flawed (Trade Union Information and Research Centre 1990: 3).

The shift in the union movement's approach to new technology and work organisation were reflected in the literature. The conflict-based narrative of unions struggling with employers over the introduction of new technology was replaced by discussion of cooperation and consultation and the need to adopt the new forms of technology and work organisation. In several instances union-management agreements that in the early 1980s had been regarded as industrial or legal victories for the unions over management prerogative, such as the technological change agreement between various unions and Telecom, had by the latter half of the decade metamorphosed into examples of the benefits of management-union cooperation and the need to move beyond the rigidities of Taylorist or Fordist systems of work organisation.²

There was also a renewed emphasis on the need for workplace consultation from the Federal Government although the emphasis was on financial incentive rather than legislative compulsion. In keeping with the *Industrial Democracy and Employee Participation Policy Discussion Paper* which recommended financial incentives amongst a range of initiatives, the Federal Government promoted the importance of employee participation in workplace decision making in its 'best practice' grants program designed to promote 'world's best practice' enterprises (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations Working Environment Branch 1986). The focus

² This was most evident in the work of John Mathews. In his earlier work, Mathews had examined how unions had responded to technological change and linked this to work organisation and industrial democracy. By the late 1980s he was extolling the virtues of post-Fordist models of work organisation (Mathews 1987; Mathews 1988; Mathews 1989a ; Mathews 1989b).

however was on increasing the pace of workplace change and productivity. Given that the Federal Government had steadfastly avoided introducing legislation compelling employers to share information with their employees or to consult with them or their unions over workplace change, employer adherence to consultative practices occurred on a voluntary basis.

In spite of the apparent consensus amongst the ACTU, the peak employer bodies and the Federal Government on the benefits of cooperation and information sharing, such practices were occurring in a minority of workplaces if the results of the 1991 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey are anything to go by. This was particularly noticeable in relation to technological change. The nation wide surveys involved 2004 workplaces with twenty or more employees and 349 workplaces with five to nineteen employees as well as direct interviews with 4,500 managers and union delegates (Callus et.al. 1991:9-14). Despite the extensive organisational and industrial restructuring that had occurred in the latter half of the 1980s, technological change remained a significant form of workplace organisational change. In the two years preceding the survey 34% of workplaces with twenty or more employees had experienced the introduction of new technology (Callus et.al. 1991:187). In relation to the frequency of consultation between management and unions on the introduction of new technology, union delegates reported that management in 47% of surveyed workplaces would never consult with unions over the introduction of new technology (Callus et.al. 1991:134). Only 14% of all workplaces contained joint consultative committees (Callus et.al. 1991:125). On the more general notion of significant workplace change, in 32% of workplaces employees were consulted about significant change and in 28% of instances unions were consulted. Interestingly, in 23 and 46% of workplaces respectively, employees and unions were not informed of significant workplace change (Callus et.al. 1991:190). The authors noted that in a range of workplaces managers did not widely or regularly use consultation to interact with either unions or employees (Callus et.al. 1991:136).

The late 1980s and first half of the 1990s saw a shift from centralised wage fixation to enterprise-based bargaining. Employer bodies, most notably the Business Council of Australia, argued that enterprise bargaining would promote mutual trust and interest between employers and employees in an enterprise as well as increasing productivity. The ACTU regarded enterprise bargaining as a way of giving workers a

greater voice in workplace decision making. In the 1988 National Wage Case Decision, the Industrial Relations Commission established a structural efficiency principle which encouraged decentralised bargaining between employers, unions and workers to improve efficiency in return for better paying, more fulfilling and varied working conditions (Dabscheck 1995:56-7). While the April 1991 National Wage Case Decision, seemingly rejected enterprise bargaining, much to the chagrin of the ACTU Secretary Bill Kelty, it provided for up to a 2.5% increase in wages or salaries for those parties who could demonstrate, among other things, that their award required,

enterprises to establish a consultative mechanism and procedures appropriate to their size, structure and needs for consultation and negotiation on matters effecting their efficiency and productivity (Ludeke and Swebeck 1992:125).

The subsequent October 1991 National Wage Case Decision established an Enterprise Bargaining Principle which linked wage increases to enterprise based 'consultative mechanisms and procedures' (Marchington 1992:531). This shift to enterprise bargaining was strengthened by the 1993 Industrial Relations Reform Act which amongst other things provided for non-union enterprise agreements between an employer and a groups of employees. The amendments included a requirement that for an agreement to be approved by the Industrial Relations Commission 'reasonable steps' had to be taken to consult with affected employees and inform them of the various aspects of the agreement and the effect of the agreement being approved during the course of negotiations (Mitchell, Naughton and Sorensen 1997:203).

Further reforms to the Industrial Relations Act in 1994 required enterprise agreements to establish a 'process for the parties to consult each other about matters involving changes to the organisation or performance of work in any place of work to which the agreement relates' for certification to take place (Mitchell, Naughton and Sorensen 1997:204). Mitchell, Naughton and Sorensen note that the Act refers to process rather than mechanism or structure and after surveying 1947 union and non-union enterprise agreements approved by the Industrial Relations Commission between April 1994 and September 1995, they argue that the Act itself and the manner in which it was interpreted by the Commission failed to strengthen employee participation (Mitchell, Naughton and Sorensen 1997). Interestingly, the authors note that in 23% of the agreements, the collective participative mechanisms required for certification took the form of either standard or slightly modified technology, change

and redundancy clauses (Mitchell, Naughton and Sorensen 1997:209). Despite the weakness of consultative mechanisms, by 1995 60% of workers covered by Federal Awards were under enterprise agreements (Davis and Lansbury 1996:17).

In March 1996, the Liberal-National Coalition was elected to office. Within several months of taking office the Howard Government introduced its industrial relations legislation, the Workplace Relations Act, to the parliament. With the support of the Australian Democrats, the Workplace Relations Act passed through the Senate and became law. The Act allows for individual contracts known as Australian Workplace Agreements. In relation to collective certified agreements, the Workplace Relations Act removed the need for consultative mechanisms during the life of an agreement and only requires that during negotiations an employer explains the proposed agreement and takes 'reasonable steps' to ensure that employees have access to the document 14 days prior to approval being given (Mitchell, Naughton and Sorensen 1997:198).

Another key aspect of the legislation was a process of award simplification that restricted the number of matters that could be included in Federal awards to twenty so-called 'allowable award matters'. The requirement that an employer notify affected employees and their unions in the event of significant workplace change is not an allowable matter and as a consequence provisions dealing with employee consultation over workplace change have been removed from federal awards. Under section 89A of the Act, the jurisdiction of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission is restricted to 'industrial disputes' related to these allowable matters and as a consequence the Commission cannot deal directly with the process and effect of introducing new technology or other forms of significant workplace change. So-called non-allowable matters can be included in certified agreements; however it seems that having been freed from an award-based requirement to consult with unions over significant change, there has been a reluctance to include it in enterprise agreements. A survey in 2001 found that of the enterprise agreements certified in the federal system since 1997, only 10% contained provisions requiring employers to consult with trade unions in the event of workplace change (Forsyth 2003:150). In effect the Workplace Relations Act has negated the consultative aspects of the 1984 termination, change and redundancy decision and in the process codified the supremacy of management prerogative.

Conclusions

Some months after she had developed an inventive solution to the 1978 Telecom dispute, Mary Gaudron addressed a conference of the Australian College of Education on the 'Changing World of Work'. In her address, Gaudron dealt with the hostility of Australian unions to technological change. She attributed much of this hostility to the unwillingness of employers to give unions advance warning of technological change or to involve them in the selection and adoption of new technology. She said:

Even when employees have gained information in advance of the introduction of new technology, their requests for involvement in the decision-making process have been met with the response either of managerial prerogative or of higher engineering and/or technological knowledge. This too has contributed to the suspicion and opposition of trade unions and unionists to the introduction of new technology (Gaudron. 1979:37-8).

It could be argued that in the period 1978 to 1996 Australian unions on the whole adopted a reactive role in relation to adoption and implementation of new technology at the workplace level. Unions have assumed a role akin to that of fire fighters, becoming involved in the process of technological change when the alarm bells ring. In large part this reflects the options offered by the other actors in the industrial relations system. Employers have resisted greater union and employee involvement in the selection and implementation of new technology on the basis of management prerogative. Law and custom have restricted industrial tribunals in their ability to regulate such prerogative. And governments have steadfastly avoided legislating for greater workplace decision making. Unions must also bear some responsibility for this situation. Where unions like the WWF and ATEA have taken the initiative they have ensured a greater 'voice' for their members and themselves in the adoption and utilisation of new technology, a process that has proved cyclical in the eighteen years under consideration.

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