

**PAUL BASTIAN – NATIONAL SECRETARY
ADDRESS TO 2016 AMWU NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet and pay my respect to their elders past and present.

Like Andrew, I would also like to welcome our international guests.

It is an honour to open this year's Conference. Every Conference is a reminder of the rich, democratic history of our organisation.

Every Conference is an opportunity for us to reimagine our union and the world in which we organise. A time to raise our heads above the day-to-day struggle and imagine what kind of society we want for the future.

I'd like to take you back to the 2013 National Conference. Some of you were there, some of you were not. But imagine your reaction if I had announced that by the 2016 Conference:

- Malcolm Turnbull would have just been returned as our Prime Minister?
- Pauline Hanson would hold the balance of power in the Senate?
- There would no longer be a car industry by 2017?
- Donald Trump was one step away from having access to the world's most powerful nuclear arsenal?
- Britain was no longer part of the European Union?
- That the most popular national pastime would be grown men and women running around the streets looking for Pokemon critters on their phone?

There have been big shifts in local, national, and global politics in those three years. The gap between the rich and the poor is increasing and it is playing havoc with our political, economic and social structures.

- The richest 62 people in the world now own the same wealth as the poorest 3.6 billion people.
- The richest 1% now have more wealth than the rest of the world combined; and
- In Australia, the top 1% now has as much wealth as the bottom 60% combined.

Addressing inequality and redistributing wealth is at the heart of what trade unions do and without strong unions, the gap in inequality will continue to grow.

We know that in times of economic disruption and transition, it is ordinary workers that hurt the most. Right now there are 800,000 Australians out of work. Youth unemployment is up at 25% in some regions. Wages growth has stagnated. Many of us can no longer afford a house. 12% of us could not put \$1,000 together in an emergency.

This disruption has also hit manufacturing. We have lost 77,000 jobs since the Coalition came to power. The end of the Australian car industry will see another 50,000 jobs go, 5,000 of them will be AMWU members. There are 15,000 less apprentices than there were in 2013. Capital investment in our sector is at an all-time low.

Instability and disruption has hit Australian politics too. The end of certainty, the loss of secure jobs in established industries, and the rise in inequality has led to a move away from the traditional parties and the rise of candidates who blame other marginalized groups for the troubles of the world. The rise of racism and xenophobia is a reflection of this and it finds voice in Pauline Hanson, in Donald Trump, in Brexit and in the rise of the right wing parties in Europe.

We must stand against it. Our union has a proud history of embracing diversity and fighting against racism in all forms and we will continue to do so.

In the context of the election, we can be proud of the union campaign led by the ACTU. We campaigned in 21 marginal seats on things that matter to our members – penalty rates, education, Medicare and public services. And we delivered, taking Malcolm Turnbull to the wire with an average swing in those seats of over 5% – 2% higher than the national swing.

As in the last term, we will be working hard to make sure that the cross benchers understand the problems with the Government's anti-worker, anti-union strategies and doing everything we can to stop them in their tracks.

But regardless of who's in charge in Canberra, we will keep campaigning hard on what matters for members and the submarine campaign is a terrific example of what can be done with a solid, member-led campaign.

Make no mistake: our campaign secured a \$150b local submarine industry that will create tens of thousands of jobs up and down the supply chain for decades to come. It was truly a magnificent outcome.

Christopher Pyne can crow all he wants but we know it was the hard work of ordinary shipbuilders and delegates organising through their union that won this campaign. Members took to the streets and the corridors of Canberra to drive their message home. ASC delegate, Glenn Dallimore stood as the Labor candidate in Mayo in South Australia and it was his preferences to the Xenophon candidate that saw the Liberals lose that seat for the first time. That's what smart campaigning looks like and we can be proud of the work we have done to deliver this vital piece of national defence infrastructure.

Another terrific and solid campaign by members through their Union was the much needed family friendly rosters won by the FIFO workers on the Gorgon project in WA. FIFO rosters have been a scourge for many families and this has been an important struggle in ensuring fairness for workers in that industry. It is a credit to these members and to their Union.

These are just two examples among many victories large and small since the last conference and I would like to acknowledge all of those members who dared to stand up for something at work since the last Conference – who've put their faith in the workmates and their Union and made a difference. This is exactly what we're here for and it's what has driven me for over 45 years as a proud unionist.

Of course if we're going to keep making a difference in the lives of workers, then we need to grow and you've seen from the numbers in your book that we've been struggling with this. There are as many reasons for this as there are people in this room, and previous Conferences have identified most of those reasons and developed most of the answers too. But still we struggle.

Growing our union must be at the core of everything we do and while we will continue to organise in our traditional areas, we must reach out to new occupations and industries. We have recently conducted research into the attitudes of auto-technicians and clerical and administrative workers. There are 90,000 auto-technicians and 80,000 clerical and administrative workers eligible to be AMWU members.

Our research shows that these workers want to improve their workplace conditions and build a career path. Our initial pilot organising indicates that these are promising areas for growth. I can assure you that while there are a lot of things on the agenda for the Union in 2017, we will not lose track of these vital areas of potential membership.

In summary, our members have faced remarkable challenges since the last Conference and the pace of change and disruption is likely to pick up in the next few years.

In that context, I would like to turn to some of the key issues for this Conference and for the next few years.

The first is the future structure of the Union itself.

You will recall that we commissioned Greg Combet and Andrew Whittaker to report on the governance and financial structures of the union. The results show that two decades of industry decline are having an impact on our union. By 2020, we are likely to have less than 50,000 members nationally. This doesn't just risk our capacity to win improvements for working people, it jeopardises our entire existence.

The Review was brutally honest. It talked about the cumbersome governance structure we have inherited, the impact it is having on our resourcing strategies and the functioning of our union. It gave an honest account of some of the hurdles we have to get over and the strategies we will need if we are to attract new members and represent them in the face of significant changes in the world of work.

In short, the Review recommended that we rebuild and renew ourselves to make sure we're fit for purpose and ready to deliver what our members expect.

I want to thank everyone who has engaged in the debate about the new Union in the lead up to conference. It has been robust and respectful and I'm looking forward to continuing the debate over the next few days.

Of course, we are not the only union facing these challenges. Private sector union density has hit single digits and is likely to fall further. This does not just have an impact on individual unions and their members: it undermines our collective capacity to intervene and shape the kind of society we want to create and to work for those who rely on us to put things right.

The response to this problem is not ours alone. In the coming week, some of Australia's leading private sector unions will meet to discuss a joint strategy to reverse this decline. The meeting will be attended by the leadership of ASU, CEPU, United Voice, and the NUW.

The possibility of mergers will clearly be a topic for discussion. Indeed, the objects of our rules require us to strive for one union in our industry. But we need to consider mergers in the right context. It can't be just about size and money. It has to be about values, in the best interest of our members, and about building a new union capable of reversing decline. It is an opportunity to reshape the organising and industrial landscape in this country and to meet the challenges of the new economy.

Another key issue for me at this Conference is pushing for a new industrial framework – one that allows workers to engage in new parts of the economy without having to accept less job and income security.

We will be much more successful in this work if we can break out of the enterprise bargaining straight jacket which has shackled our organising capacity and drained our resources for too long.

We need a new framework with a genuine safety net underpinned by strong awards that provide for a living wage, not just a minimum wage:

- A framework that provides genuine industry-wide bargaining rights with no restrictions on the matters we can claim;
- A framework that provides real protections for insecure workers such as automatic conversion to permanent employment, portability of entitlements and an end to the shonky outsourcing of jobs to avoid obligations, and
- A framework that provides unrestricted access for workers to their union, solid rights for delegates, and the right to strike.

Workers starting out today will have 17 jobs over their lifetime. Right now, around half of the Australian workforce have no access to basic leave entitlements. No annual leave. No Long Service Leave. In an economy where workers are required to be ever more flexible and mobile, our system of leave accruals has not caught up. Every time a worker starts a new job they are forced to start from scratch. That's why we need to be campaigning for a system of portable leave entitlements to make sure that workers can move between jobs while maintaining their entitlement to holidays and personal leave.

And another matter I want us to campaign hard on is support for women facing family and domestic violence. On average, two women die every week as a result of family violence. We need to recognize the impact this has on people at work and we can play an important role in this campaign. This includes ensuring that family violence remains a core part of our bargaining agenda by way of including provisions for support and leave in our collective agreements.

In closing, I want to tell a story about one person. It's a bloke named Vaughan. Vaughan is 35 year old fitter who has worked for his employer for 7 years. One Thursday night, Vaughan and 54 of his workmates were called to meeting room at a hotel near their workplace. Vaughan was told he no longer had a job. He was made redundant from his job as a maintenance worker, and re-offered the exact same job with a 65% pay cut. Vaughans employer is Carlton United Breweries, maker of VB and other famous Australian beer brands. Their parent company, SABMiller, made \$2.4billion profit last year and didn't pay a single cent in tax in Australia. In the heart of a Melbourne Winter, Vaughan has sat on a picket line with 54 of his workmates for 7 weeks taking on this corporate giant.

Vaughan and people like him are the collateral damage in the unrestrained drive of corporate greed. The only thing that stands between Vaughan and that greed is us.

That's been our role over the last 160 years and I want to make sure we will continue to do it as effectively as possible over the next 160 years. If we aren't there for people like Vaughan, then no one will be.

I'm looking forward to a great Conference. I'm looking forward to hearing your contribution on the big debates, and I look forward to working with you to keep our Union strong.