Australian Union Strategies
Since 1945

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Abstract
The purpose of this article is to advance a model of union strategy and to test it using evidence of Australian unionism in the period since 1945. The model is based on several premises: first, that union practices are not the product of random choices but tend to result from overarching mutually-reinforcing strategies. Second, that the overall strategy of a given union is driven by its choice of bargaining strategy. Choice in this field has a strong if not determining influence on external relations with employers, the state and other unions, as well as internal relations within the union itself, and staffing practices. Finally, the model incorporates a feedback loop, with choices in the area of external relations, internal relations and staffing practices having an influence on bargaining strategy. The article then uses evidence of Australian union practices drawn from a variety of sources to test this model.

A Model Of Union Strategy
The issue of union strategy has been at the forefront of union thinking since the 1980s, evident in the production of a series of major documents written or endorsed by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), including Australia Reconstructed (ACTU-TDC, 1987), Future Strategies for the Trade Union Movement (1987), Unions 2001 (Evatt Foundation, 1995) and unions@work (1999). Underlying these documents has been the understanding that unions face a limited range of strategic choices and must substantially change if they are to retain their relevance. Despite these significant developments in the labour movement, relatively little has been done to advance models of union strategy in the Australian academic literature. The purpose of this article is to develop such a model and to test it using evidence of trends in union practices since World War Two.

A useful starting point in the development of a model of union strategy in Australia is an article by Gardner (1989). Gardner starts by discussing the debate about strategy generally, critically assessing the issues of whether strategy requires consciousness, explicit deliberation, long-term horizons, and so forth, before drawing the conclusion that in trade unions as much as in companies, such requirements are far too
restrictive. Trade unions usually steer somewhere between long-range planning and crisis management, but they do so in a way that still merits the description of strategy. Gardner (1989:55) summarises her definition of strategy as follows:

A union strategy can be defined ... as the characteristic means by which a union attempts to implement policy and achieve its goals. These means need not be consciously or explicitly selected but will be, in general, the result of accretion of experience, an unconscious but customary process.

Gardner then suggests that union strategy is 'a sum of eight key discrete choices, each with a range of options' (p.55). These eight choices are outlined in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Options</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy arena</td>
<td>Industrial  Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of negotiations</td>
<td>Centralised  Decentralised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership and leadership involvement</td>
<td>Concentrated  Diffused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union method</td>
<td>Autonomous  Collective bargaining  Arbitration  Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of industrial tactics used</td>
<td>Narrow  Broad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to other unions</td>
<td>Isolated  Integrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequence of activity</td>
<td>Confictual  Co-operative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union values</td>
<td>Leadership discretion  United action  Autonomous action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gardner (1989:56)

Gardner suggests that unions are not free to make choices but are constrained by political factors (industrial tribunals, government legislation), market factors (macroeconomic environment and industry structure) and management strategy (collective bargaining). Unions also face internal constraints including composition of membership ('collar colour';
labour market power; labour market stability), and structure of union government. The final important element of Gardner’s model is her argument that strategy is subject to inertia: ‘in the absence of dramatic change in the environment or in leadership, union strategy will develop slowly and undergo only minor modifications over long periods’ (p. 67). Gardner concludes her article by setting up future research possibilities in the field, including ‘application of the model to a number of union cases to identify any relationships among elements of the model and common union strategies’ (pp. 67-68).

Gardner’s model provides a useful starting point for an analysis of union strategy. But it is only a starting point. The main factor that limits its utility is the absence of any suggestion as to what might be the key ‘relationships among elements of the model’. This is especially important because, as Gardner (p. 68) argues, there is a risk that ‘analysis will degenerate into ad hoc descriptions of union choices’. Indeed, it may be suggested that in the absence of such an argument on this score, Gardner’s is not a model as such, more a typology. In order to progress, research needs to: a) suggest more explicitly the nature of relationships between the model’s various elements, and to establish which are dominant and which are secondary; and b) using those insights, elucidate some of the major strategic patterns followed by Australian unions over a period of time.

A further requirement for such a model is a more judicious selection of ‘key discrete choices’. For example, Gardner’s concept of ‘range of industrial tactics’ does not appear particularly useful. Gardner suggests that more militant unions use a broader range of tactics than more industrially conservative unions. This seems to be an uncertain assumption to make. Furthermore, there is no reason that a more direct indicator, such as preparedness to strike, could not be used. Likewise, there appears to be little difference in the categories of ‘membership and leadership involvement’ that could not be covered under the choice of ‘union values’ (or vice versa).

In Figure 1, I sketch the basics of an alternative model of union strategy, one which incorporates aspects of Gardner’s work but builds on it. This model is based on six key arguments. First, union practices are not the product of random choices from an unconstrained menu of options but tend to result from overarching mutually-reinforcing strategies. Second, the overarching strategy of a given union is driven by its choice of bargaining strategy, that is, the means by which union members seek to advance their political and economic interests in conflicts with employers and governments. Choice in this field has a strong if not determining influence on external relations with employers, state and other unions, as well as internal relations within the union itself. I also suggest that underlying union goals and political and economic context play an important role in underpinning choice of bargaining strategy (Gardner’s ‘constraints’). Fourth, any model of union strategy must involve more than the eight ‘key choices’ that are provided for in the Gardner model if it is to fully capture the complexity of union behaviour. In this sense, the proposed model is both more dense and more simple than Gardner’s.
Figure 1: An alternative model of union strategy

Bargaining strategy ➔ 1. External Relations ➔ 3. Staffing practices

Underpinned by:
- leadership political affiliations
- underlying union goals
- political and economic context

- employers
- state (incl. tribunals and government)
- other unions

- staffing infrastructure
- appointee characteristics
- role of specialists
- sources of recruitment
- destination of leaders on leaving office

2. Internal relations
- relations between leaders and rank and file
- role of delegates and workplace organization
- methods of internal communication

The fifth argument underlying the model is that choice of bargaining strategy has an impact not just on external relations and internal relations but also staffing practices. Changes to union staffing practices have been the subject of study by Bramble (1995; 2000) in the Australian case and by Heery and Kelly (1994) in the British. It is evident that such practices have undergone rapid change since the 1960s, and this factor is consequently explicitly introduced into this model. Finally, a feedback loop must be included in any model of union strategy, with choices in the area of external relations, internal relations and staffing practices having an influence in turn on bargaining strategy. Although not as strongly determining as the original choice of bargaining strategy, the existence of such feedback cannot be ignored.
Testing The Model

Methodology
Having outlined the skeleton of an alternative model of union strategy, I now propose to examine its validity in the context of union practice in the period since 1945. Any analysis of union strategy in this period is hindered by the fact that, as Pocock (1998:30) argues, 'There are few detailed studies of the internal culture of unions in terms of styles of management, financial and personnel culture, leadership and institutional norms and behaviours'. In order to remedy this deficiency, evidence for this article has been drawn from a variety of sources, including published accounts of individual unions, data from the 1986, 1991 and 1996 Censuses, and 33 interviews with officials and delegates from four separate unions: the Australian Education Union (AEU), the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (specifically, the metal trades component of this union), the Transport Workers Union (TWU), and the Finance Sector Union (FSU). Data from these interviews inform the analysis that follows and are sourced where relevant. The interviews took place between January and May 1999 and were conducted by a research assistant. Twenty one respondents were full-time union officials, six were delegates, and one was a rank and file union member. The remaining five had left the relevant industry at the time of the interview, either through retirement or by changing careers. Twenty five of the interviews took place in person, mostly at union offices, but some in workplaces or cafes. Eight interviews took place by phone. Thirty of the respondents resided in Victoria, two in Western Australia, and one in South Australia. Length of interview ranged from 20 minutes to two hours, averaging 90 minutes. All interviews were taped and subsequently transcribed.

The Evidence

Bargaining Strategy
The range of bargaining strategies pursued by Australian unions in the post-war decades can be summarised as arbitrationist, mobilisationist, corporatist and activist (broadly equivalent to Gardner's 'union methods' of arbitration, collective bargaining, political, and a mix of bargaining/ arbitration). Table 2 summarises the key elements of these strategies, and in what follows I provide a little expansion on the chief points.

Arbitrationist and mobilisationist strategies were rival currents within the Australian labour movement during the post-war decades until the demise of the latter in the late 1970s. Of the two, the arbitrationist was by far the more popular amongst conservative union leaders, as it appeared to provide a simple, cost-efficient method of regulating wages and conditions for large numbers of workers without the physical discomforts and hard work associated with collective bargaining and industrial action. According to one opponent of this strategy 'the arbitration-happy [union leaders] worship the award as a sacred cow and consider that they are serving the best interests of their members by taking every issue to arbitration' (Hutson, 1966:98). To the extent that such leaders called strikes, their purpose was overwhelmingly to bring a dispute to the attention
of the Arbitration Court/Commission, hence Australia’s record of large numbers of strikes of less than one day’s duration. The Australian Workers Union (AWU), the Shop Assistants (SDA), the Clerks Union (FCU), the Australasian Society of Engineers (ASE), the Vehicle Builders (VBU) and the Ironworkers (FIA) (from the early 1950s onwards) typified the arbitrationist approach.

The mobilisational strategy was evident in only a minority of unions, but the leading role of these unions in the strike waves of the post-war years and the period from 1967 to 1975 meant that their activities had far-reaching significance. The best statement of the mobilisational model is From Penal Colony to Penal Powers (1966), written by a research officer in the Engineers Union, Jack Hutson. The defining feature of this model was the central role played by aggressive workplace activism and close job control. The ambitions of the mobilisational model were also usually defined far more broadly than were those of the arbitrationist unions, both in terms of the economic improvements that might be made, but also in relation to political vision. Many leaders and activists in mobilisation unions were leading figures in the Communist Party (CPA) (or its offshoots) or the Socialist Left of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in Victoria, and were usually anxious to connect ‘political’ and ‘economic’ campaigns, not always successfully, but occasionally to great effect.

The metal trades unions, which had long emphasised factory-level agitation, job control and the leading role of shop stewards were the prime exponents of the mobilisational strategy (Goss, 1975; Hince, 1971; Sheridan, 1975; Davis, 1978). The prevailing culture of the metal industry is well described by Greg Harrison, formerly assistant national secretary of the then Amalgamated Metal Workers Union (AMWU):

Historically we haven’t resolved conflict in this industry by going down to the Melbourne Club to resolve our differences over cocktails or a cup of tea. Within this rough-as-guts boom/bust industry, the over-award campaign strategy and tactics became institutionalised. With rigid demarcation and over-award campaign tactics, a union official’s life was based on how many heads you could kick in the boom times, and how many he could defend during the hard times (cited in Way, 1989:83).

Success in winning improvements through the use of mobilisational methods soon saw the metalworkers’ tactics adopted by several other unions in the 1960s, most evidently in the power stations, chemical, oil refining, and building industries and resource projects (Benson, 1988; Rimmer, 1989; Burgmann and Burgmann, 1998). There were also increasing echoes of such tactics in the white-collar ‘professional’ unions covering teachers, nurses and public servants. The Victorian teachers unions were an example of unions that in the early post-war decades relied on ‘arbitrationist’ methods (in their case involving appearances before a State Government teachers’ tribunal), but which in the wave of industrial action in the 1970s shifted to a mobilisational strategy. The current deputy secretary of the AEU reports that in the 1970s:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Arbitrionist</th>
<th>Mobilisational</th>
<th>Corporatist</th>
<th>Activist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Application to tribunals for improvements in wages and conditions. Distributive bargaining (win-lose) limited by extent of claim (modest) and terrain of struggle (wages and hours).</td>
<td>Industrial campaigns at key sites to establish precedents. More aggressive distributive bargaining in relation to extent of claim (substantial) and terrain of struggle (equity issues; control over work; social and political demands).</td>
<td>Trade-off with Federal Government to achieve improvements in conditions through legislation and national wage cases. Integrative bargaining (win-win), but in practice acceptance of work intensification and cuts in real wages.</td>
<td>Enterprise bargaining with employers. Distributive bargaining, evident in industrial campaigns and &quot;living wage&quot; cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlying goals</td>
<td>Gradual economic improvement through industrial and political means.</td>
<td>Economic improvement undermined by vision of radical social transformation.</td>
<td>(i) Business competitiveness; (ii) Social reform through Government action.</td>
<td>&quot;Holding the line&quot;: survival and renewal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy arena (G)</td>
<td>Political/industrial</td>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Industrial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to strikes</td>
<td>Extreme reluctance to strike beyond what was necessary to expedite an arbitration hearing.</td>
<td>Frequent preparedness to strike.</td>
<td>Hostility to strikes.</td>
<td>Preparedness to strike in limited circumstances when provoked by employers. Emphasis on &quot;positive media image&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of negotiations (G)</td>
<td>Centralised</td>
<td>Decentralised</td>
<td>Centralised</td>
<td>Decentralised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of industrial tactics used (G)</td>
<td>Narrow</td>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>Narrow</td>
<td>Broad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequence of activity (G)</td>
<td>Follower</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplars</td>
<td>AWU; SDA; FCU; VBU; FIA.</td>
<td>AMWU (and its predecessors); BWIU; WVT; BLF; VSTA (in later period).</td>
<td>AMWU; BWIU; CPSU.</td>
<td>Australian Education Union; CPSU.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: "G" refers to one of Gardner's "eight key discrete choices" in this and subsequent tables.
We had no award then. We couldn’t go to court. So things were fought out much more on the streets. And I think there was a lot more branch action — we got conditions bit by bit. A particular school would stop and fight for conditions. If there was someone with too many kids in the class, the whole school would fight around it — so it was done school by school (interview, Christine Stewart, 16 April 1999).

The success of the mobilisational strategy was evident in the strike wave of the early 1970s when real wages and the wages share of national income both rose rapidly. By the middle of the 1970s, however, the strategy began to be undermined by the end of the long post-war boom, first signalled by the recession of 1975 and confirmed in stark terms by the following recession of 1982-83. The decline of the strategy did not take place in all industries simultaneously. The more traditional blue-collar unions were hit first, with newly militant white-collar unions continuing to organise on this basis into the latter half of the decade. Nonetheless, the latter were eventually to succumb to the same overall trends.

The economic crisis had two effects that are crucial to understanding the demise of the mobilisational strategy and the emergence of the corporatist approach within the labour movement. First, the mass sackings in manufacturing tended to undermine the confidence of many union activists to fight over issues at workplace level and reinforced the tendency towards centralisation evident with indexation (Davis, 1977:354; Rimmer, 1989:135). At least indexation appeared to secure wage rises at no cost in terms of wages lost through strike action or the threat of victimisation. The crisis also led to a major reassessment of political and industrial strategy by union leaders which was evident first in their acceptance of wage indexation (Donn, 1975:398) and, later, in the search by these same leaders for ways to restore the competitive fortunes of business.3 The AMWU was crucial in this trend, and its support for indexation in 1975 was followed two years later by publication of the mass-produced pamphlet Australia Uprooted, in which the leadership of Australia’s largest and most powerful union declared its commitment to improving the efficiency of manufacturing industry.

The significance of changes to the politics of the AMWU was that they were a precursor to the corporatist strategy, which enjoyed dominance in Australian unions between 1983 and 1993. Discussions in the leading bodies of left-wing mobilisational unions such as the AMWU and the Building Workers (BWTU) in the late 1970s and early 1980s led these unions increasingly to favour an approach very different to that which they had utilised for the previous decades. Instead of mobilising members using strike action to win gains by direct action against employers, union strategy was now to use the field of state politics to advance social and economic goals and to downplay the use of strike action as a weapon (Scalmer and Irving, 1999). Key goals were an improved health, welfare, social security and pension system and ACTU influence over the economic policy agenda. The traditional emphasis on wages and working conditions was to be downplayed in favour of enhancing national and sectoral competitiveness, in the hope that this would lead eventually to a return to full employment. The election of the Labor
Government in March 1983 on the platform of the Prices and Incomes Accord signed by the ALP and ACTU represented the realisation of this vision, one that was further developed in the ACTU’s 1987 policy document *Australia Reconstructed* (in which the corporatist strategy was labelled ‘strategic unionism’).

Corporatism was premised on the political hegemony of the ALP. With the defeat of the federal ALP Government in 1996, and the decision by a growing number of employers to break rather than parlay with unions, the corporatist strategy was no longer viable. Characterisation of its successor is not simple: for want of a better term, I use ‘activist’, as it is most in line with the philosophies espoused by Unions 2001 and unions@work. While corporatist unionism was informed, at least in its early stages, by an ambitious vision for Australian unionism at the centre of the country’s social, political and economic landscape, activist unionism is a philosophy of survival in the first instance. With the decline in union membership of 700,000 and a halving of union coverage in the 1990s, a sense of pessimism informs the activist approach. It is also, however, rather less utopian than the corporatist strategy. Bargaining under the auspices of the activist strategy is primarily undertaken with a ‘win-lose’ distributive mentality, with no pretence by union leaders that the outcome is likely to be other than the bare maintenance of real wages in return for a deterioration in working conditions.

In common with both the arbitrationist and the corporatist strategies, the activist strategy regards strike action and pickets as either unnecessary or unwise. However, the rationale for this opposition is different. Supporters of the arbitrationist approach pointed to the tribunals as the appropriate avenue for resolving grievances or increasing wages. Supporters of the corporatist approach suggested that strikes potentially created electoral problems for the Labor Government and undermined the labour movement’s long-term political goals. By contrast, the activist strategy downplays strikes on the basis that they are likely to lose and, under the highly repressive legislative framework established by the *Workplace Relations Act* of 1996, may open the unions to massive fines. Instead of strikes, unions have come to rely on ‘community campaigns’, legal hearings, media publicity, and shareholder pressure to force concessions by employers. The union campaigns against Patricks Stevedores by the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), and Rio Tinto and BHP by the Mining Division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) demonstrate the use of all these tactics. They are also evident in white-collar unions. Rob Glare, Victorian branch secretary of the AEU, comments on union strategy in 1999, in the twilight years of the Kennett Government:

This year, we’re hoping to take the accent off stopworks and industrial action and that kind of thing. We want to spend more time and money on political action outside school hours and on paid publicity, free publicity, letter writing, involving parents – there’ll be a whole lot of different actions that really mount a political attack on the government (interview, 27 January 1999).
External Relations
The four bargaining strategies that have been followed by Australian unions since 1945 have had a very clear and direct effect on the nature of external relations established by unions (Table 3). Arbitrationist unions enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the Arbitration Court/Commission in the post-war decades, as they had done since the foundation of the Commonwealth arbitration system in 1904. In order for the Court/Commission to carry out its business, it required organisations which nominally represented the interests of entire occupational or industrial groups of workers to act as respondents to industrial awards. Commonwealth legislation therefore provided for registration of unions, and with that, a series of legal privileges that unions enjoyed only so long as they remained registered. In return for state support, unions were subject to intensive legislative and judicial regulation of their internal affairs, to an extent quite unknown in other industrialised societies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relations with employers</th>
<th>Arbitrationist</th>
<th>Mobilisation</th>
<th>Corporatist</th>
<th>Activist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Sweethart”; preference agreements; closed shops and dues check-off, in return for industrial peace.</td>
<td>Direct face to face bargaining with the larger employers. Use of arbitration to “flow-on” gains were by direct action. Preference clauses and closed shops won by industrial campaigns.</td>
<td>Partnership for industrial efficiency.</td>
<td>Defensive in face of new employer strategy of union-busting.</td>
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| Tactics in relation to state | Emphasis on arbitration and deals with ALP state governments. | Marginal role for political lobbying; disdain for arbitration except insofar as it was used to flow-on gains from “hot shops”. | Top-down deal-making between ACTU and ALP federal government, replicated at state level. | Disenchantment with “political action” (eg “never another Accord”). Active use of courts and arbitration where possible (living wage cases; unfair dismissal cases; certification of EBAs; management of change agreements). |

| Relations with other unions | Jealous preservation of membership; strict policing of boundaries; reluctance to engage in joint action. | Strict policing of boundaries, alongside a readiness to engage in joint action with members of other unions. | In theory, “industry unionism” driven by ACTU amalgamation strategy; in practice, federative unionism driven by factional expediency. | Co-operation in adverse circumstances (eg CFMEU, AMWU, MUA and CEPU alliance in Victoria) alongside fratricidal disputes within amalgamated unions. |
Growth of the workforce, in combination with sweetheart arrangements with employers and preference clauses in industrial awards, ensured steady growth in membership and revenues of arbitrationist unions and, in the case of those unions who remained affiliated through the great Labor Party split of 1955, secure positions on ALP executive bodies. Boundaries between rival unions were jealously guarded by the leaders of such unions, most especially in relation to the mobilisational unions whose more militant approach threatened to lead to defections from the ranks of the more conservative unions.

The mobilisational strategy, by contrast, was premised on establishing direct bargaining relations with employers, and this was done by mounting campaigns at the best-organised sites, what were called in the metal industry the ‘hot shops’. An aggressive stance by unions was at times met with a similar response by employers, metal industry employers for example being very keen to supplant the Engineers Union by unions such as the VBU, the FIA and the ASE when the opportunity arose. In turn, the metals trades unions appealed directly to the rank and file membership of such unions to follow their lead, further heightening tension between the unions.

Mobilisational unions did not ignore the Arbitration Commission. Hutson (1966:102), summarised the approach of the metal trades unions in the 1960s:

>The arbitration system will exist for quite a while, so it has to be taken into consideration, but this should be done with the intention of drawing members away from it... The struggle on the job by the rank and file is decisive in determining what can be got from arbitration, as it can often persuade the employer to concede much or all of the claim.

The mobilisational unions therefore used arbitration as a tool to spread gains won by use of strike action in the better-organised workplaces: ‘An application to arbitration should be made, if it is necessary, at a time when it can best obtain recognition of the established fact or the expression of popular will’ (Hutson, 1966:154).

The corporatist strategy pursued by unions in the 1980s was premised upon very close relations with Governments at Federal and, where Labor-governed, State levels. This was most evident in the public sector. The Victorian teachers unions, especially at secondary and ‘tech levels’, had taken regular strike action throughout the latter half of the 1970s, frequently drawing them into sharp conflict with the Liberal Government. The election of the Cain Labor Government in 1982 saw all of this change. Consultative committees were established at central and regional levels within the Education Department, involving representatives from the Minister, management and staff. Rather than fighting for better conditions through collective action, leaders of the teachers unions were now increasingly dedicated to the task of making the Education Department function more efficiently. This meant that committee work took precedence over strikes. Very similar trends were also evident in the private sector after the establishment of a variety of bipartite or tripartite industry councils in 1983–84 by the Hawke Labor Government.

Corporatism also served to centralise power across the union movement. Unlike the arbitrationist model, in which the State (or occasionally the Federal) secretary of the relevant union was effectively sovereign, the corporatist model featured a series of highly
centralised political deals involving usually only a limited number of senior national officials and advisers, leaving leaders at branch level to grumble that they had been marginalised by the Accord processes. Some of these processes were accelerated by the wave of union amalgamations that took place in the early 1990s.

To the extent that the activist strategy is based on enterprise bargaining, unions are again faced with the task of establishing direct bargaining relations with employers. As opposed to the 1960s and 1970s, however, the terms of engagement have unions very much on the defensive. And as opposed to the 1980s, most unions appear to be sceptical that any arm of the state can save them. At the level of rhetoric, at least, the emphasis is on self-reliance, even if at crucial times union leaders seek respite in the courts from employer attacks. The ACTU, having been an ardent supporter of enterprise bargaining in the early 1990s, is now also forced to seek wage increases via ‘living wage cases’ at the Industrial Relations Commission for those unable to access increases through collective agreements. In their relations with each other, there are also evident differences, with some unions actively seeking to organise mutual-aid pacts whereby each will come to the support of the other in the event of an employer attack. At the same time, some unions are now dealing painfully and expensively with the fall-out from the bureaucratically organised amalgamations of the early 1990s.

Internal Relations

The four bargaining strategies have each also been associated with particular types of internal regime. These are summarised in Table 4, which covers much of the same terrain as Gardner’s ‘key discrete choices’ regarding ‘membership and leadership involvement’ and ‘union values’.

The arbitrationist strategy was in most cases associated with top-down bureaucratic relations between leaders and members. Indeed, the arbitrationist strategy was premised on such relations, as the Arbitration Court/Commission usually relied on union leaders to maintain tight control over ‘their’ unions in order to avoid strike activity while a hearing was in progress. Wildcat action by members, such as occurred at Mount Isa Mines in 1964 (Mackie, 1989) and at the Ford Motor Company in 1973 and 1981 (Lever-Tracy and Quinlan, 1988), only discredited and embarrassed the arbitrationist union leader, and for this reason the latter were usually keen to suppress independent member activism, including co-operating with employers to have activists dismissed from their jobs. The role of delegates in unions pursuing this strategy was limited to that of guarding against award breaches, recruitment and collection of dues (where no dues ‘check-off’ arrangement existed). Such an approach underpinned the ACTU’s 1961 policy on shop committees which, according to Hutson (1966:219), effectively reduced these bodies to ‘the minor role of industrial boy scouts’. With little need for organising on the job, mass meetings were few and far between, and communication from leaders to members was usually fairly infrequent and mostly in the form of usually dull union journals.

In most cases, the choice of an arbitrationist strategy was self-reinforcing, as suppression of autonomous organisation at workplace level meant that few challenges
emerged to the power and strategy of union leaders. Furthermore, the arbitrationist strategy was most common in those unions where no tradition of membership activism ever existed (as in the case of many of the small unions, but also some larger entities such as the VBU, the FLA, the SDA) or where it had existed but had been defeated. Unions in the former category tend to be characterised by relatively unskilled or semi-skilled memberships (as in these three) or by memberships that regarded themselves as ‘above’ the use of proletarian methods of action such as the strike (for example, the FCU).

Table 4: Internal Relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach by leaders to rank and file involvement</th>
<th>Arbitrationist</th>
<th>Mobilisational</th>
<th>Corporatist</th>
<th>Activist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top down; bureaucratic; collusion with employers to suppress membership activism.</td>
<td>Participative; active role of delegates and mass meetings.</td>
<td>Top down; bureaucratic; involvement of narrow layer of full-time delegates.</td>
<td>Nominally bottom-up and activist, but in episodes of industrial struggle (eg MUA; CFMEU at BHP) top down and bureaucratic.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

|------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|

| Role of delegates and workplace organisation | Minimal; guard against award breaches; recruit and collect dues. | Extensive: as for arbitrationist, plus responsibility for waging campaigns (sometimes quite independently of officials). | Minimal; some role for full-time delegates in “restructuring committees”, overseas tours etc. | Heavy emphasis on recruitment; some responsibility for enterprise bargaining. |

| Main mechanism for communication between leaders and rank and file | Personal relations between delegates and officials; branch committees; branch journals and newsletters. Otherwise relatively little. | Mass meetings, delegate meetings; branch committees; branch journals and newsletters. | Mainstream media appearances; branch journals and newsletters. Otherwise relatively little. | Growing use of marketing and communication techniques: surveys; focus groups; internet. |
The nature of the internal regime in unions following a mobilisational strategy was diametrically opposite to that in force in the arbitrationist unions, being characterised by high levels of workplace activism. Here we will give evidence of two such unions, the Engineers and the Victorian teachers unions. Membership participation had a long tradition in the Engineers Union, which until 1967 was run by district committees. Full-time officials could attend and speak at such meetings, but had no voting rights. Typically the district committees would invite the union’s officials to the meeting so that they might give a report to members about their activities. The Engineers’ first appointed education officer, Max Ogden, explains:

In the old district committees it was very interesting. It was physically laid out so that all the district committee sat around the table and the officials – the four or five we had – would only speak when they were asked to, or when they gave their reports. All of that gave a culture of rank and file control (interview, 20 March 1999).

More important than the Engineers’ constitutional structures in maintaining the union’s democratic culture was the fact that the union very actively promoted shop steward activity (Goss, 1975; Scalam and Irving, 1999). Ted Gnatenko, shop steward from GMH Elizabeth and later the South Australian branch’s first education officer, remarks that: ‘In the ‘60s and ‘70s, the shop stewards were masters of the union, and the organisers were the servants’ (interview, 18 March 1999). While there is certainly an element of exaggeration in the notion that the stewards were actually ‘masters of the union’, this comment conveys something of the culture of the metal trades unions in the late 1960s in the larger and more active factories and workshops.

Membership participation in the Victorian teacher unions also increased rapidly in the 1970s as they shifted to a mobilisational approach. The Victorian Secondary Teachers Association (VSTA), for example, held frequent school delegates meetings, which had significant influence on the union’s monthly state council meetings that took charge of the union between conferences. State council meetings were attended by 40 or more rank and file teachers and only one full-time official, the union’s president. The teacher unions were not alone amongst the white-collar public sector professional associations in undergoing a sharp shift in the 1970s; many branches of the various public-service unions were also affected by the influx of radical university graduates who challenged leaders from right-wing factions and espoused democratic and participatory union strategies (Kuhn, 1980).

By the time that Labor won office in 1983, the grassroots organisation characteristic of the mobilisational unions in the 1960s and 1970s had significantly declined (Hutson, 1983:226), for reasons we have already outlined. The corporatist strategy confirmed the demise of the mobilisational strategy, as it was associated with the conscious suppression of industrial campaigns likely to threaten commitments by the unions to make no further claims beyond those arising out of National Wage Cases. Ted Gnatenko remarked in 1990 of the impact of the Accord on the internal characteristics of many Australian unions:
There is an increasing gulf between the members and the national officials. There appears to be a growing tendency for senior federal officials in many unions (including the ACTU) to make up their minds about what is needed and then tell the members what to do, rather than taking their guidance from the members, as was always the practice in the past (Gnatenko, 1990:10).

The involvement of some stewards, particularly full-time stewards, in industry restructuring programs, and the introduction of second-tier negotiations and award restructuring in the late 1980s may have brought some delegates back into activity (Rimmer, 1989:141), but the political basis on which they were mobilised was very different to that in the 1960s and 1970s. They were now incorporated into an agenda of improving company competitiveness (frequently at the expense of jobs and working conditions), rather than fighting for improved wages and conditions (Sealmer and Irving, 1999).

The manufacturing unions were not alone in witnessing a decline in grassroots activism in the Accord years. In the Victorian education unions, involvement in budget-setting and a range of high-level consultative structures heralded a significant shift in the centre of gravity of these unions. The overall effect was a steady decline in school-based activity, a centralisation of power within the teacher unions, and, in the absence of mass meetings associated with the mobilisational strategy, the distancing of leaders from members. Graham Holt, formerly delegate with the Technical Teachers Union of Victoria (TTUV), explains the situation that prevailed in the Cain and Kirner years:

It created a situation where decisions that affected people in schools were being made by people in the Education Department after they had agreement from the central union. So the teachers wouldn't actually have much input. The decision would be announced that this had been negotiated with the teacher union. So it would be decided at the top (interview, 28 April 1999).

It is now widely accepted in union circles that the undermining of workplace unionism during the Accord years caused serious damage (Evatt Foundation, 1995:57). The two major strategy documents of the activist approach (Unions 2001 and unions@work) emphasise the need to rebuild delegate organisation. However, just as unions@work does not signal a clear rejection of the politics of the corporatist strategy, claiming instead that the Accord 'delivered significant social and industrial improvements' for Australian workers (unions@work, 1999:9), so there are limits to the new emphasis on delegate organisation. Specifically, the strategy does not make space for increased delegate power. The activist strategy shares with the arbitrationist and the corporatist strategies, the conception of the membership as an 'object' of leadership strategy rather than a subject capable of determining its own destiny. Thus, according to Neil Kimpton, former TTUV organiser, now delegate in the AEU:

The union now, in the perception of members, is a service organisation. You go to the union on an individual basis. It's not thought of as the place where you say, all right, we're all going to get together and pull off a stop-work which was the modus operandi in the late 'seventies (interview, 21 May 1999).
We have already referred to the reliance by unions such as the MUA and CFMEU on strategies such as 'community campaigns', legal manoeuvres, media publicity and shareholder pressure that do not mobilise members but place them in the position of cheer-leaders for measures being taken on their behalf by lawyers, financial advisers and media consultants. This phenomenon is not limited to these two unions. Following a brief series of one-day strikes against the newly-elected Kennett Government in 1992-93, for example, the leaders of the Victorian education unions resolved to bring relief to their members by seeking refuge in a federal award. Neil Kimpton explains the impact on the union:

... [W]e spent literally hundreds of thousands of dollars not on campaigning but on lawyers’ fees, getting into the Commission and getting the award up and running. And though we used our members to put our case together, we did move into essentially the way which every other white-collar union operates. We were no longer focussed on the rank and file, the grass roots, but we were focussed on getting something through the courts that would negate the need to have to drag out the troops every other day (interview, 21 May 1999).

Another factor central to the activist approach that tends to limit the role for delegates is the belief by many union leaders that management techniques borrowed from the corporate world can be profitably adopted by trade unions. unions@work, for example, advises union officials to develop 'modern structures and management' (p.1) and to 'build union media capacity and market the union message' (p.1) in order to bridge the gap between themselves and members or potential members and to marshal public opinion behind campaigns. Union leaders are called upon by the ACTU to 'conduct an audit' (p.15), to 'develop more efficient ways of servicing' members (p.2), to conduct 'strategic planning', and to 'measure outcomes against objectives' (p.36). Such philosophies became increasingly evident in Australian unions in the late 1990s. The Finance Sector Union met massive bank restructuring by mounting a publicity campaign and conducting multiple surveys of members to ascertain their views on a range of issues. Similarly, the leadership of the Victorian branch of the Transport Workers Union conducted strategic planning conferences, and made use of staff development companies to upgrade the skill base of its staff in 1998. The union is also investigating the potential of fee-for-service schemes.

**Staffing Practices**

Having reviewed the impact of bargaining strategy on external and internal relations, I now turn to their impact on staffing practices (Table 5). Arbitrationist unions, for the most part, had relatively low numbers of employed staff, at least until the 1970s. Most unions operated out of Trades Hall buildings, and were equipped with only basic office assistance: a secretary-typist cum telephoneist and only a part-time branch or national secretary. While some unions had full-time research officers, such officers were very few in number and only found in the largest unions (Wielgosz, 1974:325). The low number of staff was partly due to the poverty of all unions in this period. Although some had more than 50,000 members, most unions were substantially smaller, and this was reflected in their meagre financial base. The predominance of small unions was related in turn to the impact of
arbitration which kept alive many unions that would otherwise have merged or been taken over (Deery and Plowman, 1991:236). Small size was not the only factor, however, with even some of the larger unions getting by with a few staff: the Victorian branch of the Australian Bank Employees Union had only three organisers until the mid-1970s, and the Victorian branch of the Transport Workers Union had only eight organisers in 1970. Neither employed any industrial officers.

Table 5: Staffing Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staffing infrastructure</th>
<th>Arbitrational</th>
<th>Mobilisational</th>
<th>Corporatist</th>
<th>Activist</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited, through retention of law firms to assist in tribunal work</td>
<td>Limited, through some growth in early 1970s to respond to workplace bargaining</td>
<td>Rapid expansion in employment of all types, but most especially “specialist staff”, with assistance of Government funds</td>
<td>Cut-backs in admin, infrastructure; maintenance of FTO positions even after amalgamations; employment of economists, lawyers, PR, and media staff.</td>
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| Valued characteristics of appointees | Delegate experience; ALP/CFA involvement; “learn on the job”. | Delegate experience; ALP/CFA involvement; “learn on the job”. | Delegate experience and political involvement (organisers); university degrees (specialists); increased use of external training and accreditation, even for industrial staff. | Delegate experience and political involvement (not just ALP but student unions); university degrees (specialists); increased use of external training and accreditation. |

| Role of specialists | Lawyers used extensively in tribunals; otherwise very little initially, although increasing numbers in the 1970s. | Relatively low, but increasing in 1970s as back-up to workplace bargaining. | Extensive, both in development of strategy and in bargaining. | Extensive both in development of strategy and in bargaining. |

| Source of recruitment of officials | Mostly through internal means, but some external recruitment of political cadres (eg NCC); initial suspicion of graduates, but increasing numbers in 1970s. | Mostly through internal means, but some external recruitment of political cadres (eg CPA); initial suspicion of graduates, but increasing numbers in 1970s. | Increasing reliance on university graduates. | Increasing reliance on university graduates. |

| Destination of senior leaders on leaving unions | Retirement or political appointment (parliament; state instrumentality; tribunals). | Retirement; political appointment. | Political appointment; some corporate appointments. | Political appointment; some corporate appointments. |
While poverty was certainly one factor in explaining staffing practices, the use of arbitration itself tended to limit the need to appoint large numbers of staff. While the process of obtaining a federal award was extremely complex and time-consuming (Hutson, 1966:71), once such awards were obtained, arbitration allowed for the concentration of the bargaining process into what were effectively large multi-employer collective agreements, requiring for their updating little other than appearances at the Arbitration Commission (Griffin and de Rozairo, 1993:431). The system of national wage cases and the roping-in of dozens, if not hundreds, of employers into single awards created economies of staffing for unions who would otherwise have had to negotiate specific agreements at industry, enterprise and workplace levels. By fostering a highly legalistic approach to wage determination, arbitration required unions to engage the services of law firms. However, the lawyers hired for the duration of the more complex cases were not union employees.

Staffing practices in the arbitrationist unions until the 1970s tended to be dominated by the internal labour market. Most senior officials had come from the ranks of members and had served many years as delegates and in a variety of lay positions. Very few had much formal education. According to a survey of union officials in Western Australia conducted by Johnston in 1970, 81 per cent of officials had left school aged 15 or less, and only two per cent had tertiary training (Johnston, cited in Duffy, 1980). On their departure, if not to retirement, very few officials returned to their former calling. Most middle-ranking officials entered positions in personnel management or left the field of industrial relations altogether, to self-employment, university study or any number of destinations. Many former senior union officials found positions in the ALP (in either its parliamentary or organisational wing), in the industrial tribunals, or in Government instrumentalities.¹⁰

Although their bargaining strategies differed sharply, the staffing practices of the mobilisationist unions were fairly similar to those in the arbitrationist unions in the early post-war decades, albeit for different reasons. For example, the Melbourne district of the Engineering Union (later to form part of the AMWU), had only five full-time officials (a full-time district secretary, three organisers and an industrial officer) to cover 18,000 members in the late 1950s (a ratio of 0.28 officials per 1,000 members). A sixth official covered the whole of country Victoria and Tasmania. In the union’s South Australian branch, there were only three full-time officials, two clerical staff and no appointed specialists. Mobilisationist unions shared the same problem of poor finances suffered by the arbitrationist unions, but a further factor explaining the low numbers of staff was a preference for the work of the union to be carried by the lay activists, in line with the general approach to bargaining. This preference was as much evident in the newly-militant unions such as the Victorian teacher unions as it was in the metal trades unions. Neil Kimpton explains the relationship between the mobilisationist bargaining strategy, the internal regime, and staffing practices in the ‘tech’ teachers union:

In the early years of the then TTAV, it was certainly very much a grassroots organisation...
For many years the TTAV had only one full-time officer, the secretary... Which meant that
most of the people who were the movers and shakers were the people in schools who went to executive meetings and council meetings in their own time. … Not having any staff worked because we'd been facing an intransigent government for many, many years and so that lot [of members] were used to fighting and organising on the ground. In a sense it was a very amateur show. People didn't expect to go into a union career… (interview, 21 May 1999).

During the upswing in direct action in the late 1960s and 1970s, the staffing practices of the mobilisational unions began to change. More staff, especially specialist education and research staff, were appointed to meet the needs of the bargaining strategy. The metal trades unions led the way (Scalmer and Irving, 1999). Full-time education officers were appointed by these unions to help train shop stewards in bargaining and dealing with management. The unions also established a Combined Research Centre in 1967 whose role it was to provide research support to the delegates in over-award bargaining (Sheridan, 1975:303).

By the end of the 1970s, specialist officers were to be found across a range of Australia’s larger unions, both mobilisational and arbitrationist. The latter were increasingly encountering companies possessing sophisticated industrial relations staffing infrastructures and were being forced to improve their preparation for appearances at the tribunals. The extent of the new appointments is illustrated in a 1979 survey of 34 white-collar unions, 22 of which employed one or more research officers (Cupper, 1983:180). Other specialist officers employed by these unions, most especially the teacher unions, included information and publicity officers (10), legal officers (8), education officers (5), welfare officers (3), policy development officers (2) and women’s advisers (2) (Cupper, 1983:181). Plowman and Spooner (1983:118) also found 44 industrial/research officers employed in 67 blue- and white-collar NSW-registered unions in their 1981 survey.

While some mobilisational unions had a high ratio of appointed staff drawn from outside the union (e.g. the federal office of the Builders Labourers Federation [BLF] in the 1970s), the general ethos in such unions was for elections. Bill Noonan, Victorian branch secretary of the TWU in 1999, reports:

In days gone by, you couldn’t get a job in the union unless you were elected. A lot of the members used to say: ‘Well, who are you to come and talk to us, because we didn’t vote for you’ (interview, 12 March 1999).

The preference was also for internal candidates with extensive experience in the industry. On average, the 19 full-time officials in the Victorian branch of the AMWU surveyed by Davis in 1976 had been members for 21 years before taking up their posts (Davis, 1978: 181-83). Callus’s 1984 survey also confirms that long membership and years of unpaid service for the union was common in NSW unions (Callus, 1986). This preference also applied to the first round of appointments of staff specialists. The first four education officers appointed by the AMWU (in 1972-75), for example, were all tradesmen. This was also true of the union’s first three research officers and its first workers compensation officer.
With the emergence of corporatist strategy in the early 1980s, union staffing increased sharply in number. Between 1986 and 1991 the number of union officials increased by one-third, from 3,231 in 1986 to 4,306 (ABS Census data). Much of this increase was funded by the Hawke and Keating Governments, which paid unions $51.3 million in grants between 1984-85 and 1994-95, most of which was tied to the employment of staff. This period also saw the increasing appointment of university graduates. Although such appointments had become a noticeable phenomenon by the mid-1970s, they accelerated during the Accord years. Between 1986 and 1996 the number of trade union officials whose highest qualification was an undergraduate or postgraduate university qualification increased from 1,047 to 2,021 (ABS Census data, 1986 and 1996). By contrast, the number of those with blue-collar trades qualifications fell from 763 to 492. The result was that by 1996, nearly one-half (48.5%) of all union officials were university educated, as against only 11.8 per cent who possessed a trade qualification (ABS Census data, 1986 and 1996). While part of the rise in educational qualifications was in line with changing patterns in the workforce in general, the composition of the official workforce shifted at a much faster rate.

The growing numbers of staff, the Government funding of such staff, and the increasing numbers of graduate appointees all signalled a change in the nature of union staffing in the Accord years. The corporatist strategy demanded a different set of skills than in the past. This is evident in the Victorian secondary schools sector under the Cain Government. Brian Henderson, then secretary of the VSTA, explains the rationale behind his union’s appointment of research officers:

"[W]ith Labor in office there was a chance for consultation when in the past there wasn’t. […] This period called for a different set of skills in the union office. In the past, all you had to do was say you didn’t like what the government was putting up and then call your members out and go into negotiations about it. But now you were talking about implementing things in relation to system-wide change. We were involved in discussions about budgets and budget targets that the government wanted to meet, and how we could meet those targets (interview, 25 March 1999).

Likewise, Max Ogden reports that, with the introduction of tripartite and bipartite industry councils in the metal and engineering sector:

"… we needed industry development officers with uni qualifications. We were sitting on all sorts of Government bodies and we needed back-up expertise (interview, 26 March 1999)"

Unions such as the AMWU used Government funds to appoint industry development officers, whose role was to facilitate union participation in Government-sponsored industry plans (the ‘Button Plans’). Between 1990-91 and 1993-94 alone, unions received $4.6 million in Government funds to employ ‘work change advisers’ whose role was to facilitate industry restructuring, ‘best practice’, and enterprise bargaining. The role of such officers effectively became one of union-based management consultancy, seeking out and
promoting more productive working methods and organisational processes (Scalmer and Irving, 1999). The result was a significant change in the relationship of specialist staff to members. The work of research officers, in particular, was increasingly drawn to activities that substituted for rather than supplemented the work of local activists and was premised on collaboration rather than fighting employers (in the expectation that improved efficiency would create greater job security).

The impact of the activist strategy on union staffing is still unclear. The continued expansion of union staffing has certainly been hampered by the fall in union membership that the activist strategy is designed to forestall. Nonetheless, while employment in unions fell by 10.2 per cent between 1991 and 1996 overall, the number of officials rose, albeit only by a modest 1.3 per cent (to 4,364) (ABS Census data). The decline in union staffing (the first since reliable records have been kept) was therefore entirely accounted for by losses in clerical and ‘other staff’. In addition, the continuing reliance on staff with university degrees is evident from the fact that nearly half (46.8%) of the 280 trainees taken on by the ACTU’s Organising Works programme between 1994 and 1998 were university graduates (Turnbull, 1995:8; Organising Works Annual Report, 1998).

The determination by unions to maintain numbers of officials, especially specialists, even in financial adversity can be attributed to a variety of factors. The decline in workplace union activism has meant that union officials have had to carry out some of the work formerly done by shop stewards, as well as many of the new demands associated with enterprise bargaining. Second, the strategic decision by most unions to work within restrictive industrial relations laws (rather than challenge them) has meant an immense increase in the legal complexity of industrial relations matters, necessitating the employment of lawyers on union staff. Third, the adoption of business management techniques of the type discussed above has encouraged unions to appoint staff with marketing, communication and finance degrees.

The trend towards appointment of university graduates and the acceptance of business efficiency as an important union goal during and since the Accord has also altered the traditional destination of union officials upon their retirement from the union, with the business world now becoming an acceptable destination for the ‘high-fliers’. High-profile cases include Bill Kelty (who accepted a seat on the board of trucking company Linfox on his retirement from the ACTU) and Michael Easson (former NSW Labor Council secretary) who became a consultant for law firm Corrs Chambers Westgarth and half a dozen major financial companies, a member of six boards and a Commissioner on the National Competition Council (Who’s Who, 1999:550).

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to advance a model of union strategy and to test it using evidence of Australian unionism in the period since 1945. While space has prevented any in-depth examination of many important and complex issues, the preliminary evidence presented in this article suggests that the model does contribute to understanding union practice. The model starts from the premise that union strategies tend to develop some
internal coherence and that union practice does not shift haphazardly, in line with the arguments of Gardner. This is certainly demonstrated by our ability to discern four relatively stable sets of union strategies, each of which had a lifespan of at least a dozen years.

Second, and in contrast to Gardner's suggestion that union strategies tend to emerge through the 'accretion of experience', as an 'unconscious but customary process' (Gardner, 1989:55), three of the four overarching strategies outlined in this article were arrived at quite consciously and explicitly, being formulated in documents such as From Penal Colony to Penal Powers (Hutson, 1966), Australia on the Rack (1982), and unions@work (1999). Out of these three, the strongest case for Gardner's assessment might be the mobilisation model - after all, Hutson's book was not finished until October 1965. However, its content had previously been serialised in the Engineering Union's Monthly Journal in preceding years, and its ideas were, 'the product of much collective discussion, and sometimes of hot debate, in a determined effort to get to the heart of a question and so find the way forward for the members and their union' (Hutson, 1966:x).

Third, the model advanced in this article asserts that bargaining strategy is the major driving force behind external relations, internal relations, and staffing practices. The historical experience of unions following each of the four strategies tends to confirm this argument. Unions in the post-war decades were divided between mobilisation and arbitrationist approaches. With the withering of the former in the mid- to late 1970s and the decay of the latter in the 1980s and 1990s, the traditional bifurcation appears to have ended. Unions appear instead to have converged on very similar strategies: corporatism in the 1980s and early 1990s, and activism since the mid-1990s. Choices made by unions between the mobilisation and arbitrationist approaches explain much of the differences in union practices through the post-war decades. Similarly, the shift to corporatist and subsequently activist approaches have had profound implications for union practices since the early 1980s.

The historical narrative described above has brought out the importance of underlying union goals and political and economic context in helping to determine bargaining strategy and, thus, union practice more generally, much as suggested by Gardner's 'internal' and 'external' constraints. This narrative has also justified expanding the range of variables under scrutiny beyond the eight 'key choices' identified by Gardner, and also the inclusion of staffing practices. Although this is not developed explicitly in this article, due to lack of space, the scope for a feedback loop from staffing practices, external and internal relations to bargaining strategy is also evident from the historical experience.

It is accepted that the model advanced in this article is, by its very nature, simplistic. There is little doubt that countervailing examples of relations between bargaining strategies and the 'dependent variables' exist. It is also accepted that the description of strategies and practices in each case is not especially precise. Nonetheless, I hope that this model can inform future discussions of union strategy with a better perspective on both the past and the present. Such a perspective is essential to the vital task of reviving unionism, upon which hinges so much about the country's social and political future.
Notes

1. I would like to thank Jeff Sparrow for conducting the interviews that are used in this article, and to all those who agreed to be interviewed. I would also like to thank Jeff, Mick Armstrong, Diane Fieldes, Tess Lee-Ack, Tom O’Lincoln, Liz Ross and the Labour and Industry referees for comment on earlier drafts. Finally, this article would not have been possible without the assistance of an ARC Small Grant from the University of Queensland.

2. The rationale for selection of these four unions was that they represent a modest cross-section of unionism in the period in question, covering both blue-collar and white-collar unionism, public-sector and private-sector workforces, and unions which traditionally operated on the lines of a 'professional association' and those with a tradition of industrial organisation.

3. A list of the interviews is available on request.

4. See Frenkel and Coolican (1984) for a study of the attitudes of leaders of two such unions, the AMWU and BWIU.

5. See O’Lincoln (1993) for a sensitive analysis of the ebb and flow of labour movement politics in the Fraser years.

6. The AEU was formed out of the Victorian Teachers Union (primary), the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association (VSTA) and the Technical Teachers Association/Union of Victoria (TTA/UV) as a result of amalgamations in the early 1990s.

7. See Davis (1977, 1978) for a discussion of the limits of steward participation in the AMWU.

8. Indeed, this remained the case through to the 1980s in many smaller unions (Plowman and Spooner, 1983:108).

9. As late as 1975, one-half (159 out of 323) of Australia’s unions had fewer than 1,000 members, while less than five per cent (15) had a membership of more than 50,000 (Plowman, 1983:539).

10. See Wann (1981:362) for the case of South Australia.

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Who's Who 1999

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