

reimagining
aotearoa
together



A WORKPLACE EDUCATION AGENCY FOR AOTEAROA



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We have an opportunity to build democratic and productive workplaces.

A Workplace Education Agency can be the spark that transforms how unions and employers work together.

- Trade unions are fundamental to sustaining a vibrant democratic culture both inside and beyond the workplace. Aotearoa New Zealand's industrial relations system has not always been supportive of trade union organisation and has hampered efforts to further industrial democracy.
- In addition, New Zealand employers are often not equipped to understand how to work with unions and to enable the level of worker engagement required to significantly improve job quality, productivity, and incomes.
- To support the development of these skills, the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi (NZCTU) proposes the creation of a Workplace Education Agency.
- The agency would support union membership and organiser development, assist unions in developing their organisational and governance capabilities, and help industry bodies to engage on opportunities like fair pay agreements, pay equity, and just transitions.
- This agency would also provide training and support to trade unions and employers to significantly enhance their ability to implement mutual gains approaches and deliver democratic workplace cultures.
- We have an opportunity to transform our workplaces and industries into sources of good work, productivity growth, and industrial democracy. The proposed Workplace Education Agency will help us seize this opportunity.

CONTEXT

Strong unions are the foundation of strong democracy, and good work for all.

Trade unions provide a collective democratic voice for working people in workplaces and beyond. Unions are fundamental to sustaining a vibrant and robust democratic culture, because strong and effective unions ensure workers can confidently speak out and effectively contribute to decisions that affect them. Without the support, encouragement, and protection of a union, workers struggle to be heard, and quality representation and dialogue with employers is impossible.

Strong unions also support high-productivity and high-wage employment, which remain two significant challenges New Zealand workplaces need to focus on addressing. Unions are also an important driver of equitable outcomes, and the erosion of trade union density has been an important contributor to rising inequality.

However, for decades New Zealand's political, legal, and industrial environment has been hostile to trade union organisation, frustrating efforts by unions to fulfil their broader political and industrial roles. As a result, unions are often prevented from engaging with employers and industries on issues beyond collective bargaining and individual support.

New Zealand also suffers from a lack of management acumen. Employers are often not equipped to understand how to work with unions and establish mechanisms that can improve job quality, productivity, and incomes.

To more successfully influence and shape workplaces, New Zealand trade unions need to strengthen their foundations and build their capacity and capability in organising and strategic engagement, and in their own management and governance. Likewise, New Zealand employers would benefit from strengthening their management skills and improving their ability to work productively with unions.

To support the development of these skills, and to enhance capability, the NZCTU proposes the creation of a Workplace Education Agency that would boost worker voice and dialogue in employment relations practice. Creating effective worker voice is essential if we are to establish and maintain better work.

HISTORY

Aotearoa New Zealand has done this before, and it worked.

With the right support, union education has enabled productivity, equity, and workplace change. It's time to do it again.

Over recent decades, government support for trade union organisation in New Zealand has focused on providing a legislative framework that enables representation, collective bargaining, and the recruitment of membership.

Successive governments have contributed state support for industry and employers, but have not made similar levels of investment and support for unions to grow their organisational capability and presence.

A notable exception took place in 1986, when the Trade Union Education Authority (TUEA) was created by the Union Representatives Education Leave Act. TUEA operated through seven regional offices and a national office and employed around 40 staff, including a Māori and Pacific coordinator. Its role was to oversee and co-ordinate trade union education and to approve union education courses for paid education leave. The Act provided workers with up to five days of training leave a year. During its existence, TUEA provided 150,000 participant days of training.¹

New Zealand also ran a successful programme involving Health Effectiveness

Studies Coordinators in 1989, where the NZCTU was contracted to establish a unit that provided support for joint management—union initiatives to increase productivity. These initiatives were available to unions and employers in the public health sector to undertake change management in a fashion which respected union voice and influence.

Under the Employment Relations Act 2000, a contestable fund was created for unions and employers to resource learning and development opportunities aligned with the object of the Act. However, this fund is no longer active.

In 2004 the government established the Partnership Resource Centre to support trade unions and employers develop constructive engagement practices, and in doing so enable innovation, improved productivity, and better work. The PRC developed resources and assisted unions and employers develop the skills and knowledge required to enhance constructive engagement practices.

Finally, in the mid-2000s the NZCTU was funded to develop and facilitate the Learning Representatives (LR) programme, based on the successful UK model. The

1: [Law, M.](#) (1997). The TUEA experiment: Trade union education in New Zealand 1986-1992. Crossing borders, breaking boundaries: Research in the education of adults, 275-279.

programme saw elected LRs being trained and supported. LR promoted learning among their workplace peers and helped to build learning cultures with a strong focus on language, literacy, and numeracy. There was a law change to create special LR paid leave entitlements, along with the development of NZQA-based standards specifically related to LR learning and development.

There are also international examples of trade union training initiatives that we can look to. During the 1980s and 1990s the Australian Trade Union Training Authority conducted courses using a learner-centred methodology focused on 'education for change'. The courses played a major role in strengthening union structures, representation, and education programmes in Australia.

Internationally, unions in many countries have the resources to provide extensive union education, involving residential courses on campus, as well as shorter courses to increase union skills. New Zealand unions do not currently have the scale or resources to emulate this practice; and our universities and polytechnics do not provide higher-level union learning and development opportunities.

Dave Kent; Trade Union Education Authority; Wellington Media Collective 1980-1990. "Working Life Communications, A Division Of TUEA."
https://archives.victoria.ac.nz/repositories/2/archival_objects/3173

To be effective, we can emulate efforts outside of New Zealand, but primarily we need to develop and design our own approach, drawing on our own unique history and culture. This requires an understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and a willingness to meet the challenge of creating workplaces that reflect the honour and dignity of individual and collective mahi, and the sense of purpose and meaning and dignity that comes with respecting the mana of all workers. Embodying manaakitanga and Te Tiriti responsiveness in workplace relations can be achieved through unions having the resources, capabilities and support structures they need to lead on behalf of workers.



CURRENT STATE

Our current system isn't cutting it.

Too many unions lack training support. Too many employers don't understand unions. That's holding back our people and our potential.

UNION CAPACITY

Currently New Zealand unions have scant training resources relative to demand. Larger unions have educators and the NZCTU also provides training, but this is insufficient. This is unlikely to change given the other challenges and priorities facing unions, especially in a hostile political environment.

The amount of Employment Relations Education Leave (EREL) available is too limited to meet the needs of all union members, especially in large or highly unionised workplaces. This restricts access to training and can result in only a small number of delegates receiving employment relations education each year.

The process for approving courses and calculating entitlements is also overly complex and time-consuming. Additionally, only courses that meet specific criteria and are approved by the Minister for Workplace Relations and Safety can be used for EREL. This can limit the relevance of training available, especially for emerging issues like digital rights, climate change, or Te Tiriti o Waitangi education.

Finally, some employers are reluctant to release staff for EREL, even when entitlements are clear.

PREVAILING INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ENVIRONMENT

The role of unions as the collective voice of workers in the workplace and beyond has been seriously hampered by political and business leaders who either do not understand and/or are ideologically opposed to unions.

The Employment Contracts Act 1991 had the effect of redefining the role of unions as 'bargaining agents' – that is, as being concerned almost exclusively with negotiating collective agreements and representing members in personal cases. The wider political and industrial role of providing collective worker voice on the operation of the workplace and beyond was significantly curtailed.

The Employment Relations Act 2000 only partially addressed this problem. Today, the expectation from the shop floor through to senior leadership typically remains that unions are mostly in the business of negotiating terms and conditions of employment.

Compounding this challenge is the lack of management skills and acumen in New Zealand. With important exceptions, employers and senior managers usually do not understand the value of worker voice

and industrial democracy and/or do not have the skills to work productively with unions. The prevailing culture is one of top-down, command-and-control management. Workers are often expected to simply obey instructions and decisions imposed on them without question. Many New Zealand employers like to remain firmly in control of decision-making and instinctively do not trust workers, especially those organised in unions, to be involved.

It's little wonder the quality of work is not as good as it should be, both in terms of the experience of workers and the outcomes and products of work. Poor productivity, poor health and safety, low wages, lack of training, low morale, and lack of job satisfaction characterise too many workplaces and industries in New Zealand.


There are some positive union-led worker participation systems in health and safety, and there has been notable positive adoption of “high performance, high engagement” practices in some workplaces. However, the vast majority of New Zealand workplaces – even unionised ones – do not have robust industrial democracy practices.

Union Education

TRADE UNION EDUCATION AUTHORITY

★ The Union Education law says that union education should be provided by unions. Unions will determine the curriculum, and run the course, subject to approval by T.U.E.A.


This is the experience of 4 workers who have attended courses run by Unions.



★ DENISE ROCHE

Denise is a career officer with the Northern Tyneside Workers Union. Her members work in Britain and overseas in various jobs and sectors.


"I did not know much. I'm grateful to my own governors. I was told they pay me to organise workers, to inform them of their rights and so that they can be better paid. I have told these courses several school friends. They have more questions to ask so I can't stress them. They're grateful rather than bored."



★ JOHN WHAREHINGA

Johns job as insurance agent is fairly busy, but he is also a Union activist in Tyneside and has much to learn in Union Education about their demands.

"I had asked in Tyneside Bay if I could attend working abroad and employment. John is now working in Central Tyneside and has been designed for the Commonwealth course. I thought I had to be better educated. When the law says I am better off in education. They have the money to spend on it and make it better. I think it's right to go about unions, the law, and it's right to be about unions and how to handle them."



★ LIONEL SKILLCORN

Lionel works in Hobart and is the Union branch President of the Commonwealth Union.

"The programme of Union courses seems to have a positive, kind of a design to it. I don't see how to run a committee, how to run a meeting, how to make a speech, how to negotiate with employers. How to read the Agreements properly, how to read the law. I think it's a good idea to have a meeting, but I feel nervous and not ready."



★ HINE EDMONDS

Hine works in the kitchen at the Fabrite Hotel. Three years ago she was about divorce.

"I have a lot of people at home who are coming to know about unions. One thought that unions are just something about unions. I don't know much about it, but I'm actually about where I work. All have been to come from being a divorcee, now I've got much more something now every day."

The T.U.E.A. will assist Workers and their Unions with:

- ★ INFORMATION
- ★ POSTERS LEAFLETS PAMPHLETS
- ★ FILMS VIDEOS EQUIPMENT
- ★ SEMINARS: On a wide range of workday issues: Sexual Harassment, Health and Safety, Being an effective Delegate, How Awards are made, Negotiation techniques.

★

T.U.E.A. will assist Unions to increase the participation of their Women, Maori, and Polynesian members.

★

Paid Education Leave is an important step forward. HELP US MAKE THIS LEGISLATION WORK!

THE TRADE UNION EDUCATION AUTHORITY (T.U.E.A.) can help as:

FLU BUILDING
LUKES LANE (off Hammers Street)
WELLINGTON. PHONE 846-749

If you're outside the Wellington region, ask your Union or Trade Union Council.

★ YOU'RE WELCOME TO VISIT, AND USE OUR UNION RESOURCE ROOM.

TRADE UNION EDUCATION AUTHORITY "UNION EDUCATION"
NEWSLETTER.

DAVE KENT, 1980s-1990s.

<https://tapuaka.wgtn.ac.nz/nodes/>

[view/966?lsk=8bea6dbdf94b62a892cd5a6c77e20210](https://www.irs.gov/efile/efileview/966?lsk=8bea6dbdf94b62a892cd5a6c77e20210)

FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS FOR UNIONS

Strong unions don't just happen. They are built through everyday skills like recruiting, organising, and leadership.

Effective worker voice rests upon strong basic union organisation. Establishing and maintaining this requires union access to workplaces, where unions have conversations with members and non-members and effectively communicate a compelling vision for a better workplace and a strategy for how to achieve this. Achieving and maintaining this level of basic union organisation across many workplaces requires considerable skill and acumen by union officials.

Unions need to operate effectively both face to face and digitally. Unions are membership-based organisations that rely on unpaid delegates to be the human face of the union in the workplace. Consequently, there is a huge demand for delegate learning and development.

Delegates need to be trained to support the members they represent, provide democratic leadership in the workplace, and recruit and organise new members. Delegates need to understand where the union movement came from, where it is now, and where it is going.

They need to develop a basic understanding of political economy, workplace democracy, the elements of good work, health and safety, the international context, and digital skills.

Finally, they require training in basic skills of recruiting, communicating, running meetings, problem diagnosis and problem-solving, advocacy, and representation.

Union organisers require the foundational delegate skills and knowledge listed above, as well as more advanced skills. They require knowledge of union strategy and tactics, consciousness raising, campaigning strategies, political economy, legal rights and obligations, and an understanding of unitary and pluralistic Human Resource approaches.

Union leaders need a good understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and what it means within the political and employment relations context. They must also know how to engage and support initiatives to honour Te Tiriti in our political and industrial campaigns.

Union leaders require competence to effectively manage their operational demands. This means understanding management, organisational development, finance, IT, and HR. Union leaders also need the skills and knowledge to confidently engage with industry bodies and government to advance fair pay agreements, pay equity, and just transitions.

Good governance is crucial for democratic membership-based organisations like trade unions. People who hold governance

positions therefore need to understand what good governance looks like and develop the skills to be effective in these roles.

Crucially, union officials must learn effective leadership skills at all levels of the organisation. This requires a solid

understanding of tactics and strategy. It also requires understanding the role of leadership in the union movement, including the role of union governance structures, and an ability to demonstrate union principles and values while building consensus and solidarity.



ADVANCED SKILLS FOR UNIONS

To truly transform workplaces, unions need skills in strategy, co-design, and change.

Genuine democratic participation involves real engagement of people in decision-making about things that affect them. If this is done well in the workplace, it produces better-informed and better-quality decisions. It also lifts job satisfaction and workers' wellbeing.

Although the foundational skills listed above are essential, for unions who want to take worker participation to a higher level and develop democratic workplace and industry culture, additional skills and knowledge are required. These skills include interest-based problem solving, understanding business finances, change management methodologies, co-design practice, and management techniques, among others.

Participation can be learned and workplaces can be transformed, but this requires a strong level of understanding, commitment, and the support of skilled facilitators and trainers.

The capacity to provide support for this transformation currently does not exist at scale.

PROPOSAL

A Workplace Education Agency would lift capability, share what works, and enable workplace democracy.

Building on the experience of TUEA, there is a need for the state to properly support building the capacity and capability of New Zealand trade unions.

We propose the establishment of a Workplace Education Agency that would provide the training and support to unions to significantly enhance their capability and capacity.

This agency would also be available, where requested and agreed, to employers, and would provide third party support for advanced industrial democracy approaches. The agency would have a strong physical and digital presence.

This proposal is for an incoming government to commit to establishing this agency with seven broad functions:

1. Support union membership, delegate and organiser development, either through providing learning and development directly to delegates and/or by providing learning and development to union educators.
 2. Support internal union organisational capability by providing learning and development programmes concerning the operation of union organisations, including governance, financial management, IT, HR, management, and other skills.
 3. Support unions with developing organisational capacity to support Te Tiriti within their structures and in their industrial and political work.
 4. Support unions and employers who are pursuing mutual gains approaches such as high performance and high engagement models of employment relations, or collaborative health and safety efforts, with third party facilitation and training.
 5. Provide research and promote evidence of successful union development approaches, including promoting the value of unions for workplace job quality and productivity enhancement.
 6. Support industry parties to organise their interests and engage on opportunities like fair pay agreements, pay equity, just transitions, industry training, and industry planning.
 7. Learning development for union representatives on external bodies, especially in governance roles.
- The agency would have the ability to conduct needs assessments for unions and employers and make recommendations.

CONCLUSION

If we want thriving, fair, and productive workplaces, we must invest in the skills and systems to get there. Let's build the future.

We have an opportunity to transform our workplaces and industries into sources of good work, higher productivity, and industrial democracy.

Industrial relations law needs to be reformed, and the NZCTU will be setting out our vision for this reform later in 2025. But substantial intervention in skills development is also required to lift and support trade unions to fulfill their mission in New Zealand and provide an effective voice in our industries and workplaces.

New Zealand industrial relations culture needs a shot in the arm to lift our performance. This is a critical issue for unions as well as any government that has a strong commitment to democracy and workers' rights and interests. After decades of decline, the establishment of a Workplace Education Agency is now an urgent priority.





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Workers Compensation
Act the right of
financial compensation
for industrial accidents
established

One of
twenty Fact
Sheets on Trade
Unions in New Zealand
Produced by TUEA
National Office: PO Box 6645,
Wellington, Ph. 852-938, Fax 855-051

This chart is based on a concept developed by TUTA
& a NZ chart originally compiled by Bert Roth & published
by the Auckland Trades Council Education Subcommittee.

1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980
<p>1 9 1 6 Party formed</p>	<p>1 9 1 9 NZ Alliance of Labour formed</p>	<p>1 9 3 2 Unemployed riots</p> <p>1 9 3 3 Depression unemployment peaks at 79,435</p> <p>1 9 3 5 Labour win landslide victory</p>	<p>1 9 3 9 - 4 5 World War Two Wages and conditions are under strict government control. <i>The Emergency Regulations Act</i> prohibits strikes and lockouts during the war</p> <p>1 9 4 5 NZ Engineering Union formed, NZ's largest private sector union</p>	<p>1 9 5 0 - 6 0 Shortages of skilled labour improves conditions for workers. Bargaining without state intervention common</p> <p>1 9 5 1 <i>151-day Waterfront Strike</i>; unions split and defeated</p>	<p>1 9 7 3 <i>Industrial Relations Act</i> overhauls NZ's industrial relations system</p> <p>1 9 7 6 Compulsory union membership ballots introduced</p>	<p>1 9 7 6 Wellington port unions withdraw their labour on the arrival of the nuclear armed warship USS Truxtun</p>	<p>1 9 8 2 - 8 4 Wage Freeze</p> <p>1 9 8 6 <i>State Owned Enterprises Act</i></p> <p>1 9 8 6 Te hui a nga kaimahi o Aotearoa meets</p> <p>1 9 8 8 <i>State Sector Act</i> reconstruction of state sector</p> <p>1 9 8 8 Council of Trade Unions formed</p> <p>1 9 8 7 <i>Labour Relations Act</i>, changes to industrial relations system</p> <p>1 9 8 0 Kinleith Dispute</p>
<p>1 9 2 2 Seamans & Freezing Workers strikes defeated</p>	<p>1 9 2 2 Seamans & Freezing Workers strikes defeated</p>	<p>1 9 3 1 Government abolishes compulsory unionism & arbitration clauses in IC&A Act, workers have no protection against wage cuts</p> <p>1 9 3 6 <i>New Labour Government</i> introduces 40-hour week and restores compulsory union membership</p>	<p>1 9 4 4 <i>Annual Holidays Act</i></p> <p>1 9 4 5 <i>Minimum Wage Act</i></p>	<p>1 9 5 1 <i>The Emergency Stabilisation Act</i> increases penalties for striking unions in response to the waterfront dispute</p>	<p>1 9 6 0 <i>Government Services Equal Pay Act</i></p>	<p>1 9 7 9 First ever <i>National General strike</i></p>	<p>1 9 8 0 Kinleith Dispute</p>
<p>1 9 3 3 Mrs Elizabeth McCombs becomes the first woman MP</p>	<p>1 9 3 3 Mrs Elizabeth McCombs becomes the first woman MP</p>	<p>1 9 3 3 Mrs Elizabeth McCombs becomes the first woman MP</p>	<p>1 9 4 2 Women tram conductors gain equal pay</p>	<p>1 9 5 2 PSA launches <i>Equal Pay</i> campaign</p>	<p>1 9 6 0 <i>Government Services Equal Pay Act</i></p>	<p>1 9 7 2 <i>Equal Pay Act</i></p>	<p>1 9 8 6 Campaign for Pay Equity launched</p> <p>1 9 8 8 "Towards Equity in Employment" report</p>
			<p>1 9 4 5 Women excluded from tram jobs by the union</p>			<p>1 9 7 8 Sonja Davies first woman elected to the FoL</p>	<p>1 9 8 0 <i>Maternity Leave Act & Employment Protection Act</i> passed to protect women workers</p>
						<p>1 9 7 2 <i>Accident Compensation Act</i></p>	

