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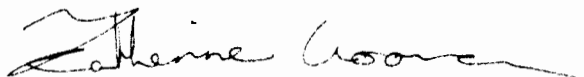
June 28, 1989

Dear Peoples,

This is a discussion paper prepared by the Launching Conference Planning Committee in Sydney. It is a list of options on Conference procedures and voting and will be discussed at the General Meeting on Sunday July 2, at 2 pm at the AMWU, 172 Victoria Parade East Melbourne.

This is being sent out in order that people have enough time to consider the proposals before the meeting.

Yours,



Katherine Goonan.  
Organiser.

# Launching Conference

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## PARTICIPATION AND VOTING

As reported in the first issue of The Comet (otherwise known mundanely as the National Bulletin), a meeting of representatives from NSW regional groups in early May established the Conference Preparatory Committee, which will meet fortnightly from now on. The first meeting on May 2 canvassed ideas and options about some of the major organisational questions, including participation and voting.

A report on all major proposals to date for the organising and running of the conference will be sent out soon. This article covers only the options and proposals on participation and voting, and provides some - hopefully objective - comments on each and the reasons for the committee's preferred options. All regional groups are asked to discuss the issues raised and to consider whether they agree with the "preferred options" from the Preparatory Committee.

### Participation and Registration

The national sponsors meeting in Melbourne in early April proposed for discussion that participation in the conference should be open to 'Time To Act' signatories who registered with their regional group by July 3. Regional groups would have to advise the Preparatory Committee by July 10 of those registering from their centre. This was to enable good planning and to ensure that participants were genuinely committed and had been involved in the process.

The Preparatory Committee thought that this condition might be too restrictive, and that many people might hear of the conference, or only decide that they want to come, close to the conference date. It is also important that the conference have an open ("user friendly") atmosphere. We therefore recommend that participation be open to anyone who actually signs the 'Time To Act' statement before the conference, or at the conference door as they go in.

However, this openness should be linked to a condition that there be a cutoff date (we suggest July 14) for the purpose of allocating voting quotas to regional groups. This will ensure fairness in any votes which may need to be taken. It will also ensure that voting at the conference will be determined by those who have actually participated in regional groups or at least joined the process before the cutoff date. The conference will then be protected from undue influences by last minute rushes, either innocent or consciously organised.

If this suggestion is adopted, we would still urge registration by July 14 wherever possible to allow good planning. Regional groups should also by July 14 nominate their voting representatives, or at the very least how those representatives will be chosen. In either case, those actually exercising votes on behalf of regional groups should have registered by July 14, and preferably participated in discussion in their own centre leading up to the conference.

The above suggestion would allow both the maximum openness and flexibility of the conference, and allow orderly decision making procedures which everyone knows about in advance.

### Voting

As decided at the national sponsors' meeting, this will be mainly a conference of workshops and consensus decision making, with formal vote-taking restricted to a few major issues where consensus may not be possible. Nevertheless, it is important to agree on a fair voting system in advance so that, if votes need to be taken on important issues, everyone knows the established procedure beforehand. This will avoid arguments at the conference itself about how votes are to be taken.

The Preparatory Committee discussed several possible alternatives, and the underlying principles which would help us decide the best one for this conference. Most people present thought we should choose a method which would best ensure that any conference voting decisions reflect as accurately as possible the input and wishes of all participants, not just those present at the conference. With this in mind, the following are options which were discussed, their pros and cons, and the reasons why they were rejected, or in one case, preferred.

## An "Open Conference"

Anyone attending the conference would be able to vote. This would have the advantage that anyone who made the effort to come would feel a full and equal participant. It has two major flaws:

\* Voting at the conference would be dominated by Sydney and other NSW people, whose "democratic right" to attend the conference and vote would be greatly enhanced by its being held in Sydney. Conversely the democratic rights of participants from WA, SA, Tasmania, etc., to attend and vote would be considerably diminished.

\* The conference would also be "open" to particular interest groups organising themselves to attend and influence decisions in a way not representative of the process as a whole. Conference participation could also be unrepresentative without any conscious organisation or deliberate attempts to achieve a particular result.

It was argued that the large amount of goodwill in the process would ensure against this happening, and that Sydney participants would contain and reflect the whole range of view which normally exist nationally. Therefore, an open conference would most likely take the same decisions as a representative one.

Against this, others pointed out that people from Perth and other places expensively far from Sydney would feel that they had very little influence on conference decisions if anyone at all from Sydney was able to vote. It would cost at least \$2500 for five people to fly from Perth. They might represent a further 70 people, yet have no more "weight" in the conference than any five people from Sydney who represent only themselves. Even if the end result would be the same in terms of actual decisions made, it was felt important that people from all regions should feel that they have had a fair input into the decisions.

## Weighted Votes For Non-Sydney Participants

A particular suggestion for ensuring that Sydney participants did not dominate involved giving weighted votes to people from outside Sydney. The proposal was to make the total vote exercised by those outside Sydney one more than the total number of Sydney participants. For example, if 599 Sydney people took part, and 200 from outside Sydney, the 200 non-Sydney participants would each get 3 votes, giving them 600 votes in all, one more than the total of Sydney votes.

This would certainly ensure that Sydney did not dominate the vote. However, it does not of itself ensure that the votes at the conference accurately represent those involved in the process, either geographically or in any other way. Votes would still be exercised by those who happened to come, irrespective of whether they represent just themselves or numbers of others as well. For example, the conference would most likely still be NSW-dominated, with Wollongong and Newcastle attenders being given plural votes just like Perth and Adelaide people.

## Representative Voting

It was concluded that some form of representative voting would be the only way to ensure that any votes taken would fairly represent all those involved around the country, and at least have the potential to also fairly represent different constituencies and interest groups (eg, women, unionists, environmentalists, etc.).

The main argument raised against any representative system is that it would create two classes of people present: those able to exercise a vote and those not. After much discussion, the majority view was that this problem is outweighed by the undemocratic consequences of a completely open conference.

Several possible representative systems were looked at:

### Proxy Voting

Any signatory could give her/his vote to somebody who was attending. This would ensure that anyone in the process around Australia would have the right to exercise their vote at the conference. The argument against it is that it could be an administrative nightmare, both to verify that proxy votes had actually been given to particular people, and in the counting of votes at the conference. It might also lead to scrambles by those attending from each centre to collect the votes of those not attending. In theory, some people could collect large numbers of proxies giving them an undue influence on the voting.

If a proxy system were adopted, a clear procedure would have to be established for verifying and exercising votes at the conference.

### Plural Voting

This system would involve each Sydney attender having one vote and participants from outside Sydney having several votes depending on the numbers in their regional group and the numbers from their group attending the conference. For example, if ten people came from a regional group with 100 signatories, they would get 10 votes.

This would certainly be one way of ensuring that a vote was exercised on behalf of each signatory. However, since those coming from regional groups outside Sydney would automatically get plural votes, this system does not really ensure that votes represent the wishes of those not attending. Those attending from a particular region may not represent their group, eg, by gender balance, political views, interest groups, yet they would be given several votes on the conference floor.

### Proportional Representation of Regions

Each regional group could be allocated a number of votes in proportion to the number of signatories they have, eg, one vote for every 10 signatories. The regional groups could then elect or appoint representatives to exercise those votes. There could be a uniform method for doing this nationally, or each group could decide itself how to do it. It was pointed out that for the Founding Conference early next year there would probably have to be a uniform method for electing delegates. However, it was thought too formal and inappropriate to do this for the Launching Conference, and that regional groups should decide themselves how to distribute their allocated votes.

This would leave regional groups free to hold an election for voting representatives; to appoint them by consensus; to distribute them to particular constituencies and interest groups (eg, proportionally to women and men, and so on); or to give the votes equally to all those attending from their group, if they are satisfied that those attending reflect the balance of interests and views in their group.

One particular proposal for groups to consider is that each person wishing to exercise a vote should get the support of 10 members from their group (if the basis is one vote for 10 members). This might be one way of ensuring that this system is not the same as proxy voting, as each representative would exercise the same number of votes.

If votes were allocated proportionally to regional groups, it is suggested that this be according to their number of signatories by July 14.

### Preferred Options

After much discussion, the Preparatory Committee meeting in early May decided that it preferred the linked options of:

\* participation being open to all those signing the statement up to the conference, with registration preferred by July 14.

\* votes being allocated to regional groups in proportion to the number of signatories by July 14, with each group deciding how these votes will be distributed to representatives.

This representative voting system could also be combined with the taking of "straw votes" of all those present on major issues to see whether there is an overwhelming consensus and to test the views of conference participants. However, if formal votes are required, only mandated representatives would vote.

Groups are asked to forward their views by July 3 via their National Liaison representatives, and /or by writing to the Preparatory Committee (C/- Room 35A, Trades Hall, Goulburn Street, Sydney. 2000). Hopefully there will be a consensus, but if not, the matters will be resolved either at a national planning meeting suggested for late July, or on a Teleconference hook-up.