

# Change and Involvement at the Workplace: Evidence from the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey

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## Abstract

*The April national wage decision doubted whether Australia's industrial relations parties as yet possessed the "maturity" to conduct enterprise bargaining. This view is consistent with the traditional role of the Industrial Relations Commission and with the conclusions of the 1985 Hancock Report, which provided the rationale for a permanent regime of centralised wage-fixing in Australia. It is also supported to some degree by the results of the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey, which show that, despite the accumulating pressure for change, most workplaces currently lack the necessary 'infrastructure' for bargaining and consultation at enterprise level. In particular, the failure of Australian management to involve workers and unions in change may be seen as a major impediment to further workplace reform. The fundamental question which arises for industrial relations policy is whether to accept the situation as it is and hope for progress through the slow but steady implementation of award restructuring, or whether to provide an external impetus for the development of a workplace infrastructure through the establishment of a new*

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*framework for enterprise bargaining combined with legislation to promote information-sharing and consultation at the workplace. The central thrust of this article is that the latter approach will more effectively foster a 'strategic bargaining' culture in Australia.*

## 1. Introduction

This article looks at how Australian workplaces are responding to the pressure for change, the extent of employee involvement in decisions about change and the role of legislation on access to information and consultation at the workplace in accelerating the process of change. It draws extensively upon the results of the first 'Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey' (Callus *et al* 1991), a comprehensive survey of workplace structures and practices conducted by the Federal Department of Industrial Relations over the period 1989/90.

The survey adopted an interview-based questionnaire approach and involved general managers, employee relations managers and workplace delegates at more than 2,300 establishments in both the public and private sectors. The evidence on change and involvement at the workplace is mixed, and secondary analysis of the data has yet to begin. However, if a conclusion does emerge from the analysis so far, it is that the drive for world competitive industries in Australia will require further sweeping policy initiatives by the Federal Government.

Already, the historic nexus between tariff protection for manufacturing and centralised wage determination forged early this century by the 1906 Excise Tariff Act and the 1907 Harvester judgement has, perhaps irreversibly, been broken. The tariff reforms announced in the March industry statement (Australian Government, 1991) will virtually complete the process of opening up Australian workplaces to international competition.

Simultaneously, a series of national wage decisions has begun to link wage rises more closely to productivity improvement at industry and enterprise level, specifically through the 1987 'Restructuring and Efficiency Principle' and 1989 'Structural Efficiency Principle'. Even the latest national wage decision of April 16 (AIRC, 1991), although depressingly unimaginative in its refusal to pursue the logic of previous decisions to the stage contemplated by Accord Mark VI, does at least place considerable weight upon the continuing implementation of award restructuring at the workplace.

The transition to a more decentralised wage system has also been assisted by a range of Federal Government measures, such as Workplace Resource

Centres, Workchange Assistance, Workchange Training and a shift in the focus of the Trade Union Training Authority (Australian Government, 1989). It will now be assisted further as a result of the March industry statement by a \$25 million Australian Best Practice Demonstration Program, which will encourage companies to lift their efficiency and performance to international standards.

Of course, the performance of companies is largely a matter in their own hands. But it must still be asked whether the Government, or indeed the Industrial Relations Commission, is doing enough to foster the "New Workplace Culture" foreshadowed in a number of recent reports on our competitive prospects (Australian Manufacturing Council, 1990; Economic Planning Advisory Council, 1991; Business Council of Australia, 1991).

## 2. Changing Workplaces

The evidence from AWIRS indicates that Australian workplaces are changing, but only a small minority are changing in a sufficiently rapid and comprehensive way. While 86 per cent of workplaces had experienced at least one out of seven possible types of change in the two years prior to the survey, no single change, let alone package of changes, was widespread among workplaces in the sample.

The possible changes listed for a response in the management questionnaire included a major new product or service, restructuring of work practices, new ownership of the workplace, more commercial orientation, reorganisation of the management structure, a change in senior personnel and the introduction of new technology. It becomes apparent, however, on closer analysis of the global figures, that each of these changes taken separately affected only around a third of workplaces. In addition, of all the workplaces experiencing change, just over half had introduced between two and four changes and *only 8 per cent five or more changes*, though the proportion rises to 19 per cent for large workplaces with over 500 employees.

Using the typology of the AWIRS source book<sup>1</sup>, five or more changes

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1 The AWIRS source book has developed a new workplace 'typology' to classify the differences and similarities between workplaces in the survey sample (Callus *et al* 1991, ch 7). The salient characteristics of the five main workplace types (not necessarily in order of their presence in the survey sample) are as follows: (i) 'informal' workplaces are union-free and have relatively unstructured employee-management relations; (ii)

out of the possible seven were introduced at 6 per cent of 'informal' workplaces, 6 per cent of 'unstructured inactives', 8 per cent of 'structured inactives', 13 per cent of 'reactive bargainers' and 17 per cent of 'active bargainers'. Moreover, it should be noted that the workplaces affected by five or more changes were predominantly public utilities.

The initial impetus for change within the formal industrial relations system was the 1987 Restructuring and Efficiency Principle, which made wage rises above an across-the-board flat rate increase conditional upon restructuring at enterprise level. Ironically, the introduction of this new Principle followed the Hancock Report, which had chosen to 'doubt the viability and wisdom of productivity bargaining - at least as part of the formal industrial relations system' (Hancock 1985, para 4.87)<sup>2</sup>.

While problems were soon to be revealed in the implementation of the Restructuring and Efficiency Principle, to which we return later, it may nevertheless be seen as a watershed for centralised wage-fixing in Australia and the beginning of a transition to more decentralised arrangements. Here again, the survey indicates that a substantial 86 per cent of workplaces had implemented at least one out of 10 major categories of change required by the Principle within two years, including changes to award classifications, work practices and working time arrangements (see Table 1).

On the other hand, only 19 per cent of workplaces were able to implement a package of five or more changes, though here as before the pattern exhibits considerable diversity. In particular, the survey shows that a more respectable but still far from adequate 54 per cent of large workplaces managed a restructuring package on this scale, with the proportion dropping back to 10 per cent for a package of eight or more changes. Even among the 'active bargaining' workplaces, only 6 per cent could cope with eight or more changes.

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'unstructured inactive' workplaces are unionised but have a low level of bargaining activity as well as an unstructured approach to management; (ii) 'structured inactive' workplaces are also unionised with a low level of bargaining activity but have a structured approach to managing the workforce; (iii) 'reactive bargainers' have a higher level of workplace bargaining than structured inactives but only in response to specific needs; (iv) 'active bargainers' have a permanently high level of bargaining combined with a structured approach by management in its relations with employees.

- 2 I have previously noted the contrast between the Hancock Report, which reaffirmed the existing centralised wage-fixing arrangements in Australia, and the report of the Donovan Commission in Britain 20 years earlier, whose "support for the emerging plant and company structures at the expense of the established formal system was more progressive than the attitudes of government, employers and unions at the time" (Green and Wilson 1986a, p 83)

**Table 1. Change at the Workplace**  
(since 1987 restructuring and efficiency principle)

	Percentage of Workplaces			
	All (20 or more) employees	Large (500 or more) employees	Private	Public
Payment by EFT	40	62	36	49
Work Practices	39	70	34	52
Award Classifications	39	64	35	48
Working time	35	50	38	29
New Career Paths	30	55	23	48
Formal training	25	45	24	28
Pay Increments	19	17	21	15
Employee Participation	17	34	15	24
Dispute Settling Procedures	16	46	12	27
Removal of Discriminatory Clauses	10	20	8	14
None of these changes	14	2	17	8
Five or more changes	19	54	15	29

Source: Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey 1991

This evidence must be of concern in the light of recent research which suggests that an integrated approach to new production systems and work organisation is needed to achieve substantial efficiency gains at the workplace. Indeed, it was found in a British survey that such an approach distinguishes Japanese companies from those which attempt unsuccessfully to emulate Japanese methods: 'In the cases of total quality control, JIT production and flexible working the 'high strategic fit' companies all reported greater success than the rest of the sample' (Oliver and Wilkinson 1989, p. 86).

In Australia, however, it has not even been possible in most workplaces to *measure* the productivity gains which may have flowed from the changes already introduced, however fragmented their implementation. The survey indicates that only 11 per cent of workplaces use a 'quantity ratio based measure' of labour productivity, though the proportion increases to 20 per cent for large workplaces and an average of 18 per cent for active bargainers across the whole spectrum of workplaces.

Clearly, Australian management will need to reflect on the effort they are prepared to put into the process of restructuring and change, especially in the light of the latest national wage decision which cites their insufficient 'maturity' as a justification for reverting to the traditional outlook of the Hancock Report (AIRC 1991, p. 38). In particular, it must be recognised that at least part of that effort has to go into the development of quantifiable productivity measures at the workplace.

### 3. Barriers to Change

However, the main effort of both managers and unions must still be directed to the process of change itself, which includes removing the barriers to change at the workplace - with or without the further development of a framework for 'enterprise bargaining' by the IRC. Here as before, despite the generalisations which are often made in this area, the evidence from AWIRS is not as straightforward as it may seem.

For example, in answering the survey question, 'What, if any, significant efficiency change would you like to make at this workplace but cannot?', a remarkable 57 per cent of managers replied 'None'. This response has been interpreted as a vindication of the conciliation and arbitration system, for it seems to demonstrate that workplaces have scope within the system to introduce change. (As indeed they do, through award variations, 'special cases', consent arrangements or the 'certified agreement' procedure under the 1988 Industrial Relations Act.)

Such an interpretation derives additional support from the response to a question on 'operating hours', which were determined by demand for the product or service in half the workplaces surveyed and by an award prescription in only 14 per cent of workplaces. It also gains support from a more general question on barriers to change, where managers in a mere 7 per cent of workplaces identified awards as a 'reason why an efficiency change could not be made', compared with lack of resources or the policy of their own organisation in nearly half the workplaces.

Nevertheless, just because the conciliation and arbitration system is not

identified as the albatross it is sometimes claimed to be, the conclusion does not necessarily follow that 57 per cent of managers have set sail for change, let alone enjoyed a smooth passage. An alternative interpretation of the AWIRS data might be that a significant proportion of those managers, perhaps the vast majority, have not even attempted to undertake comprehensive and thorough-going change at their workplace. The data could simply indicate a paralysing complacency on the part of Australian management.

Moreover, in the remaining 43 per cent of workplaces, there are other barriers besides awards. Although the proportion of managers nominating unions as a reason why they cannot make changes is low at 14 per cent of workplaces overall, the proportion rises to 32 per cent for large workplaces and 35 per cent for active bargainers. Indeed, the proportion nominating awards also increases markedly for these workplaces<sup>3</sup>.

There would seem on the face of it to be an association between these figures and the evidence also found in the survey of multi-unionism and multi-awards among large workplaces. It is reinforced by the complaint of managers in 33 per cent of large workplaces and 25 per cent of active bargainers that multi-unionism itself is a source of problems on site. Interestingly, when the AWIRS sample is narrowed down to the largest workplaces in this way, the results come to bear a striking resemblance to the Business Council of Australia's 1989 study of 'enterprise-based bargaining'. In addition to a number of methodological differences, however, which have attracted controversy but are beyond the scope of this paper, the AWIRS questions continue where the BCA left off.

#### **4. Involvement in Change**

The perception of managers that unions are a problem cannot simply be dismissed as anti-union prejudice. Nor, however, should it be treated as a reason for excluding or restricting the union role at the workplace. A more sophisticated approach is suggested by the AWIRS data, which locates the

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3 Correspondingly, the proportion of managers identifying lack of resources or the policy of their own organisation as a barrier to efficiency changes in large workplaces diminishes to 23 per cent and 12 per cent respectively, compared with 29 per cent and 20 per cent for the 'average' workplace. These are still high figures and they suggest that the main sources of productivity improvement - especially in manufacturing industry where 35 per cent of managers complain of resource constraints - lie outside the field of industrial relations altogether.

most pervasive barriers to change in the decision-making style and strategy of management itself.

The real issue here is whether Australian managers are capable of involving workers and their unions effectively in change. In particular, how will the complacent majority of managers join with the determined but hamstrung minority to get the best from their workforce? And how will the unions similarly develop a constructive and responsible role in the expanded bargaining agenda at workplace level? Do they have the necessary skills and organisational presence? Indeed, does the trade union rationalisation promoted by the ACTU go far enough?

Almost all the detailed research in this area tends to 'suggest that the more intense joint labor-management efforts (as depicted by program structure, union strength and organisational factors) are, the more likely they are to positively affect performance' (Cooke 1989, p. 300; see also the essays in Bamber and Lansbury 1989 and, most recently, the work of Cutcher-Gershenfeld 1991).

Yet in Australia, the evidence of such efforts so far is not very encouraging (see Table 2). While almost half the managers in the survey profess a philosophy based on 'communication' or 'consultation', there is little systematic attempt to involve unions and employees in decisions on change at the workplace. For example, in response to a question on union involvement in significant change, *only 28 per cent of managers could claim to have consulted, and 26 per cent informed, union representatives*. The proportion improves to a more defensible 51 per cent and 28 per cent respectively for large workplaces, but still lags international best practice.

More worrying still is the lack of permanent structures for consultation at the workplace. A mere 14 per cent of workplaces (9 per cent in the private sector and 28 per cent in the public sector) operate a formal joint consultative committee, though these workplaces account for 30 per cent of employees. As one might expect, only active bargainers use joint consultative committees to any significant degree, with 44 per cent of these workplaces featuring such arrangements. This accords with research showing that 'consultation acts as an *adjunct* to the bargaining machinery, and to some extent fills in the gaps left by the latter' (Marchington 1987, p. 340).

The research gains further support, by way of corollary, from the AWIRS data on unstructured inactives, the largest single group in the workplace typology, covering 43 per cent of workplaces and 24 per cent of employees. Here it emerges in a crucial finding that, *of these workplaces, only 6 per cent had a joint consultative committee*, which parallels the absence of bargaining machinery. Again, this finding corroborates research comparing well organised with relatively poorly organised workplaces in



Table 2: Involvement at the Workplace

	Unions consulted about significant change (%)	Unions informed about significant change (%)	Ongoing formal joint consultative committees (%)	Occupational health and safety committees (%)
All workplaces (20 or more employees)	28	26	14	41
Large workplaces (500 or more employees)	51	28	48	82
Private sector	18	23	9	35
Public sector	41	30	28	55
Informal	-	-	2	8
Unstructured inactives	13	20	6	23
Structured inactives	20	30	22	60
Reactive bargainers	34	32	26	73
Active bargainers	46	27	44	82

Sources: Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey

both Western Europe and Japan (Koike 1988, ch 7).

By contrast, 41 per cent of workplaces (35 per cent in the private sector and 55 per cent in the public sector) have occupational health and safety committees, accounting for 65 per cent of employees. The much higher incidence of these committees may be attributed to the requirements of State and territory OHS legislation, all of which prescribe joint arrangements of some kind. The role of legislation as a catalyst for change is well illustrated by developments in the OHS field in recent years, and we return to the issue later in this article.

It is certainly not that joint consultative committees are any less valuable than health and safety committees. After all, 90 per cent of workplaces with a joint consultative committee report 'improved management-employee relations', 81 per cent say it is 'easier to introduce change', 70 per cent report 'improvements in productivity' and 63 per cent report 'improvements in product or service quality'.

These are telling results by any standard, and they provide a foretaste of what award restructuring is meant to achieve. So why is Australian management slow in establishing such arrangements at the workplace? Why is the 'infrastructure' for involvement at this level still deficient? The survey offers some clues, but no definitive answer.

## **5. Workplace 'Infrastructure'**

To begin with, workplace managers themselves have limited autonomy. Only 22 per cent are able to make decisions on the introduction of significant change at the workplace, and only 49 per cent are even consulted by head office. The figures are fairly uniform among workplaces of different sizes and bargaining types. Moreover, 66 per cent of workplaces are without a specialist industrial relations manager, though here it must be said in qualification that the proportion declines substantially for large workplaces. Despite this qualification, however, industrial relations managers in large workplaces are similarly constrained in their ability to initiate change.

On the workforce side, the evidence of an effective infrastructure would seem similarly bleak for the 'average' workplace, but closer inspection reveals considerable diversity (see Table 3). While only 43 per cent of workplaces with five or more employees are unionised, this proportion increases to 80 per cent for workplaces with 20 or more employees. However, of these unionised workplaces, a disturbingly high 34 per cent have no union delegates at all on site. And in those workplaces with delegates, only 39 per cent have received union training, with half of the

Table 3 Unions at the Workplace

	Unionised Workplaces (%)	Delegates in Unionised Workplaces (%)	Average Number of Unions in Unionised Workplaces	Inter-Union Committees in Multi-union Workplaces (%)
All workplaces (20 or more employees)	80	66	2.5	11
Large workplaces (500 or more employees)	96	96	6.3	35
Private sector	34	56	1.6	10
Public sector	99	85	2.6	11
Informal	0	-	-	-
Unstructured inactives	100	38	1.8	2
Structured inactives	100	48	2.3	3
Reactive bargainers	100	100	3.3	10
Active bargainers	100	100	3.7	24

Source: Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey

delegates spending less than an hour per week on union activities.

The picture is somewhat different for large workplaces, though perhaps in the end no more comforting. An impressive 96 per cent of workplaces with over 500 employees are unionised, and all of them have delegates on site. Nor are these delegates indolent, a fifth spending more than 10 hours a week on union activities. Yet in response to a question about the 'difficulties or problems you face when carrying out your job', delegates in 39 per cent of these large workplaces nominated 'management attitude'. This is by far the highest proportion out of the range of potential difficulties, and is almost double the average figure for all unionised workplaces.

A further problem here is that these are the workplaces with too many rather than too few unions. Almost half have more than six unions represented on site, and three quarters have more than four unions. Yet only 35 per cent of these workplaces, and 24 per cent of active bargainers, have an inter-union committee to coordinate bargaining with management.

More widely, a mere 11 per cent of multi-union workplaces have an inter-union committee, and 28 per cent of unionised workplaces an intra-union committee, despite the fact that employees in 41 per cent of workplaces may be covered by more than one union. This on top of a general management failure to inform and consult does not augur well for the voluntary establishment of 'single bargaining units', let alone joint consultative arrangements.

## **6. Options for Change**

Fundamentally, Australian employers are still attached to their traditional, but long superseded, notions of managerial prerogative. With some honourable exceptions, they do not understand that competing in the world market means changing not only plant and equipment but also their ideas about what it takes to be a successful manager of people.

This is perhaps the most disturbing of the AWIRS findings from a policy viewpoint, and it may go some way to explaining the cautious approach of the IRC in the April national wage decision. Given that, as a consequence, an infrastructure for bargaining and consultation is not yet in place in the vast majority of Australian workplaces, the Federal Government is left broadly with four options:

- (1) **Policy Reversal:** this option would view decentralisation of the wage system as a cyclical phenomenon, which must now be reversed to

forestall pay pressures associated with any future upturn. While the national wage decision appears to support this option, the text of the decision suggests rather that the IRC is hedging its bets. In the end, however, if Australia wishes to emulate its more successful competitors, then the required emphasis on new production systems and workplace 'flexibility' implies a permanent shift to a more decentralised bargaining focus. Even the most centralised systems, such as Sweden, are moving in this direction (Ahlen, 1989).

- (2) **Policy Drift:** this option would accept the need for greater decentralisation of the wage system, but would not support it with new policy initiatives. In other words, it would ignore the problems identified by the survey at the workplace level, particularly the lack of infrastructure for joint negotiation and agreement, and hope for the best. The most likely outcome here would be one which tracked the US experience. The unstructured inactive workplaces, in order to survive, would either make the leap to active bargaining with appropriate consultation arrangements, or they would switch to the as yet undeveloped category of 'structured informal' (Kochan, 1986).
- (3) **Negative Intervention:** this option would promote decentralisation by using legislation to restrict the influence of trade unions and compulsory arbitration. Its rationale, based on the British 'Thatcherite' model, would be to strengthen managerial control over workplace change and pay determination. Whether this approach is responsible for the high rates of labour productivity growth experienced in the UK during the 1980s is a matter of debate (Rowthorn, 1989). What is certain, however, is that the familiar problems of low manufacturing investment, low workforce morale and chronic wage inflation have returned to haunt policy-makers in that country (Poret, 1991).
- (4) **Positive Intervention:** this option would manage the transition to a more decentralised bargaining focus in a different way, by using legislation to widen the scope of joint negotiation and agreement at the workplace. The IRC would establish principles for the conduct of bargaining and continue to perform the essential role of ensuring comparability and fairness within and between awards. However, new industrial relations legislation would enable the parties themselves to take greater responsibility for change, both at the workplace level and through wider tripartite industrial policy structures (Green 1990a). The aim would be to create a new workplace type, '*strategic bargainers*', which improve productivity and performance through systematic involvement in change.

From an international perspective, there is nothing new about the use of positive legislation to promote involvement by employees and unions at the workplace (Schuller 1985; Green 1986b). As a consequence of the survey, the case for such legislation in Australia has been strengthened considerably, and, unless fresh evidence is offered or there is a dramatic and unforeseen alteration in management behaviour, the case against has all but evaporated.

## 7. Role for Legislation

The issue of legislative intervention was first placed on the policy agenda in 1986 by the Federal Government's discussion document, *Industrial Democracy and Employee Participation*, which sought the 'widest possible consultation' on its analysis and recommendations. After some controversy about these recommendations, the ACTU and CAI finally agreed in April 1988 to release a *Joint Statement on Participative Practices*, which postponed legislation in return for progress by employers on a voluntary basis.

The *Joint Statement* concluded by committing the parties to 'monitor' its effectiveness over the ensuing 18 months 'with a view to examining the desirability of its further development in the light of identified needs' (ACTU/CAI 1988, p. 17). The question of 'further development' lapsed with the build up to the March 1990 general election, but has now resurfaced in the National Labour Consultative Council, which is chaired by the Federal Minister for Industrial Relations.

The NLCC is fortunate in having the AWIRS results at its disposal, for they show unequivocally, as we have seen, that a workplace infrastructure for information-sharing and consultation is currently lacking in Australia. The April national wage decision attempts to address the problem by including within the Structural Efficiency Principle a requirement upon employers and unions to establish procedures 'for consultation and negotiation on matters affecting their efficiency and productivity' (AIRC 1991).

However, the defect in the Structural Efficiency approach is that, without scope for genuine productivity bargaining, it could degenerate rapidly into the narrow, cost-cutting exercise with which the 1987 two-tier wage round is now identified (Department of Industrial Relations 1990). In addition, the experience of the 1984 Termination, Change and Redundancy decision, and even the more recent and better publicised introduction of employer-funded superannuation, suggests that, even when operating as it should, the award system has a limited impact on all but well organised workplaces.

The fact remains that only Commonwealth legislation can have the generalised impact that is needed to establish workplace involvement on a permanent and continuous basis in Australia, just as such legislation is similarly required to establish a legal 'right to strike' in a more decentralised system (Green 1990b). What form such legislation should take is still a matter for careful consideration by the parties and the Government, but it is clear that the most successful models overseas are those which have an 'enabling' rather than prescriptive character.

For example, the European Community's recently agreed *Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers* includes rights to 'information, consultation and participation', particularly in relation to the introduction of technological change, restructuring operations and mergers. In this, the Charter is merely codifying the law and practice of most EC member states, with the obvious exception of the UK whose Government resisted the Charter and a number of earlier versions for as long as practically possible (Wedderburn 1990).

Even in Australia, a model for involvement exists in recent OHS legislation, which, as we have seen, provides the catalyst for a joint approach to health and safety at the workplace. The introduction of new workplace rights to information and consultation on *all matters relating to restructuring and technological change* would similarly stimulate a 'strategic bargaining' infrastructure and thus contribute to improved productivity and performance throughout the economy.

## 8. Conclusion

The AWIRS results allow us to conclude that while the pressure for change at the Australian workplace is intense, the response so far from employers and unions is simply inadequate. Essentially, as the IRC itself has been quick to recognise in its latest wage decision, the 'infrastructure' required to widen the scope of joint negotiation and agreement at workplace level is absent in all but the most sophisticated establishments.

However, the conclusion drawn from this observation by the IRC and some of the parties is not necessarily the right one. Indeed, it is oddly reminiscent of the argument cited long ago by Professor Isaac to the effect that 'the time for abandoning compulsory arbitration would be when employers and unions show a sufficient sense of responsibility'. Professor Isaac's response was

This argument overlooks the point that just as a muscle atrophies from

want of use, so compulsory arbitration, by reducing the need for a sense of responsibility in industrial relations, inhibits the development of organization and skills necessary for the growth of collective bargaining. (Isaac 1958, p. 506)

It has also been argued that building such an infrastructure should be left entirely to the voluntary efforts of employers and unions in each workplace, but the lack of progress with this approach is now apparent from the survey results we have examined in this article. Unfortunately, Australian management has for the most part shown no inclination to inform or consult workers about the key decisions on change affecting them, despite evidence indicating that this is an essential adjunct of workplace collective bargaining.

A different approach will be needed to initiate and adapt to change in the years ahead. That is why new Commonwealth legislation on information-disclosure and consultation is proposed as a method of securing wider involvement in change. Australia's future in a global market will depend more than ever on releasing the initiative and creativity of the 'strategic bargaining' workplace.

## Notes

This article is based on a paper presented at the Convention Centre, Canberra on March 20 as part of the national launch of the AWIRS source book. The contributions to the series of launch conferences are to be published separately by the Federal Department of Industrial Relations. I am grateful for the assistance of Mark Cully and Alison Hope, though inevitably any remaining errors are my own.

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