

**Labour movement views of post school education,
training reform and economic restructuring
in Australia between 1982 and 1995.**

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP / ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

In the 1980s and 1990s Australian trade unions, via their Accord with the Australian Labor Party (ALP), set out to reform vocational education and training and connect it to the centralised industrial relations system.

Trade unions saw a need to consolidate their position within a changing Australian and international economic context. Education and training policy was influenced by intellectual trends within economics, industrial relations and management. Its educational objective centred on raising the skill level of the Australian workforce.

The primary data for this research was collected by interviewing a group of key labour movement figures, and workers in two factories. The thesis analyses the motivations and expectations these figures held for training reform, and assesses whether and to what extent those expectations were realised. Unionists at two factories - a clothing factory and a steel factory - were also asked to reflect on their experience of training reform and restructuring in the 1980s and 1990s.

The analysis draws on these interviews and an extensive range of 'official' union records, journals and newspapers, scholarly articles and other research. It constructs a view of the union experience of promoting reform in general and training reform in particular as a means of modernising the Australian economy and improving the position and conditions of unionists.

The analysis suggests that reliance by union leaders on extensive policy negotiations with a Labor government would diminish the need for unions to directly confront conflict of interests between workers and employers was misguided. The experience suggests that policy developed in a closed circle and resistant to questioning from the rank and file will not be able to galvanise committed support on a wide scale. While formal agreement within the labour movement was achieved commitment was not nearly so strong.

Overall the expectations of the labour movement leaders were not met. Parties to the Accord could place their own interpretation on training reform, which contained many ambiguities. When the employers sought different results from the unions, the unions were in too weak a position to insist on their own interpretation. Training reform did not generally improve workers' earnings, job security or satisfaction. It did not deliver effective recognition of prior learning and created a level of complexity that alienated many union officers and delegates. The price for misplaced reliance by union officials on consensus with government and employers was a decline in rank and file workers' trust in their unions.

These outcomes undermined solidarity and gradually contributed to the movement's weakness. They serve as a lesson for future strategies.

SECTION A