

Time's up for TUTA – A Corporatist Casualty

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Abstract: TUTA had, by 1983, established itself as a major training and information resource, generally trusted and supported by unions. It had achieved this by adopting a full range of adult education principles that ensured a flexibility of approach which not only catered for the diverse needs of unions, but also satisfied the Fraser government. This situation changed dramatically after the signing of the Accord agreement and the election of the Hawke government. The ACTU actively intervened in the operations of TUTA, including its curriculum, methodology and structure, in order to mould TUTA into its corporate Accord strategy. This meant changing TUTA's 'independent' educational image to one of a 'partisan' promoter of the Accord and its processes. It was this changed use of TUTA by the ACTU and the ALP government that sealed TUTA's fate when, and if, the Coalition won power federally.

Introduction

From a history of no systematic trade union education prior to 1975 and a general suspicion of formal tertiary education institutions by trade unions in Australia, trade union education had begun to blossom by the late 1970s and had become firmly entrenched amongst the union movement by the end of the Fraser era in 1983 (Voll, 1995; Newman 1993). This dramatic change in focus by trade unions was brought about by setting up of the Australian Trade Union Training Authority (TUTA) by the Whitlam government and the success of that Authority in developing an educational curriculum and methodology suitable for the diversity found within the union movement and designed to engender a sense of trust and objectivity amongst unions from the wide political spectrum of the movement (Voll, 1995). This position of independence from the partisan politics of individual unions was achieved largely by the adoption of adult education principles which focused heavily on the participant-centred approach. This approach to methodology was influenced from the beginning of TUTA by adult education academics from the Centre for Continuing Education at the Australian National University (ANU), Canberra such as Drs Chris Duke, Fred Emery and Alan Davies. In addition, Peter Matthews, the first Director of Clyde Cameron College (TUTA National Training Centre) and the first ACTU education officer, was also an academic adult educator (Voll, 1995). The adult education methodology that was put in place within TUTA, particularly at the National Training Centre (Clyde Cameron College), was based on four traditions from which adult education draws. These are referred to as 'the liberal tradition' (that learning should be for learning's sake in pursuit of truth – the tradition of the non-credit, non-vocational course open to anyone), 'the mechanistic tradition' (draws on the behaviourists and technicians for its methodology and is usually concerned with training people to achieve organisational goals), 'the psychotherapy tradition' (the use of group work and group dynamics concerned with developing the individual and allowing the individual to realise his or her potential) and 'the community development tradition' (providing educational activities for people on their own terms and on their own home ground designed to heighten their understanding of their own social, economic and political condition and help them develop the skills and knowledge necessary to empower them to take greater control of their lives) (Newman, 1993).

TUTA training staff adopted these adult education principles in their methodology and curriculum by providing unionists (especially union officials) with the facility to learn (e.g. information seminars on economic, legal, political and industrial relations concepts) ('liberal tradition'), facilitating the development of specific skills to enable them to function more effectively as union officials (e.g. advocacy, negotiation, media courses) ('mechanistic tradition'), allowing individuals to develop self-confidence and 'grow' (e.g. leadership development courses) ('psychotherapy tradition') and generating a sense of empowerment as a group with a common purpose (e.g. the networking and camaraderie associated with TUTA courses generally) ('community development tradition'). It was set into the adult education tradition because it was essentially non-accredited education/training designed to enrich, equip and empower adults in a particular field (Voll, 1995).

Capitalising on the pent-up demand for trade union training that resulted from there being no systematic worker/union education in the past century, TUTA began attracting good numbers to its courses almost immediately and, armed with the participant-centred techniques described above, set out to convince unions from the full spectrum of union politics that their officials and members had nothing to fear from attending TUTA courses. Though this task took some years to achieve, it appeared to have been largely successful by the early 1980s. This can be illustrated in two ways. Firstly, TUTA statistics show that by June 1983, 52,732 participants had attended 2,781 courses

and that an average of 169 different unions (representing all political shades) had sent participants annually (TUTA, 1975/76-1982/83). Secondly, the independent National Training Survey ordered by the Fraser government concluded in its 1980 report: 'TUTA is not seen as having a particular political orientation and, thus, does not seem to serve partisan interests' (TUTA, 1980/81: 6, 28).

TUTA had, by 1983, established itself as a major training and information resource for the union movement, which unions not only generally trusted and supported, but saw as a resource and facility for dealing with change. Even the Fraser government, who had supported the TUTA Act, 1975 with some serious reservations, was unable to significantly influence TUTA's growth and finally approved the first stage of expansion of TUTA in 1982 (Voll, 1995).

TUTA officially ceased operations on 30 June 1996, after being wound up by the Howard government as part of its Workplace Relations and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, 1996. The fall of trade union training and TUTA, however, had begun much earlier and can be traced back to the election of the Hawke Labor government and its corporatist approach illustrated in particular by the ALP/ACTU Accord. This paper argues that, in pursuing its strategy under the Accord, the ACTU incorporated TUTA into its corporatist umbrella and thereby ensured that TUTA would not remain an independent education authority, effectively sealing its fate.

ACTU intervention in TUTA

The new Federal Labor government (elected in March 1983) set about to amend the TUTA Act, 1975 and to change the decision making process in TUTA (TUTA, 1985/86). An Executive Committee of a reconstituted Australian Council for Union Training (ACUT) was set up which became, in practice, the real decision-making body in the Authority. This became evident from the make up of the Committee, whose key members were Bill Kelty (ACTU), John McBean (NSW TLC) and Laurie Carmichael (AMWSU), the major union decision-makers, and the major spokespersons for the Left and the Right. The approach adopted by the previous Fraser government of a centralised approach to decision-making in TUTA continued by vesting operational control in this Executive Committee. This approach also mirrored the wider decision-making process in the union movement generally, and was brought about by the ALP/ACTU Accord agreement and the resultant new-found authority that this gave the ACTU (Griffin, 1994).

These members of the Executive Committee (Kelty, McBean and Carmichael) were also key architects of the Accord agreement (Carmichael, 1985). Up to the time of their appointment, although senior union officials had occupied decision-making positions on ACUT, this role was not seen as an important or prestigious one. In fact, most saw it as an onerous chore to be avoided. Therefore a switch to arguably the most influential persons in the union movement signalled a changed attitude towards TUTA and its governance. It also indicated that the major Left and Right factions of the union movement were united, through the ACTU, in their support of the Accord process. It was Carmichael, in fact, who argued that it was his union's position that the Accord agreement be endorsed by a Special Union Conference in February 1983 (Carmichael, 1985). So TUTA, in effect, became controlled by the key union officials largely responsible for the planning and adoption of the Accord. It is not surprising therefore to suggest that in TUTA decision-making from then on, the Accord became a determining factor in terms of courses, course content and methodology.

From this point the ACTU began to take a proactive approach to union participation in TUTA courses with ACTU officials and industrial officers assisting in promotion of TUTA courses and making themselves available as guest speakers and resources for courses. This new mood of union solidarity is summed up by Carmichael:

But because a large proportion of the Australian trade union movement was then painted with the brush of the 1960s, where the only thing that mattered to many was the philistine attitude about the amount of money which you got in the pay packet no matter how fast it bloody disappeared afterwards. And everybody believed that this was the best way to express your militancy and that this was the way you were a good socialist or a good principled trade unionist. Anything else other than this that represented a form of co-operation with government, was dubbed corporatism involvement and sinking one's principles. I would suggest most of the things being asserted didn't correspond with fundamental principles of trade unionism or of socialism at all. And they still don't. The basic principle of trade unionism is that we have a sense of social solidarity; that we work for the interests of all workers; that we are concerned with the social wage in particular for those who are least able to look after themselves (Carmichael, 1985: 4).

This development of the ACTU beginning to take a much more direct role in curriculum and teaching methodology was the beginning of the fall of trade union education because it was not motivated by broad adult education training concerns or expertise. The ACTU's involvement was largely political. The purposes of this intervention were, firstly, to ensure that the Accord and its processes and proposals, were 'sold' to all TUTA course participants in a consistent manner that led to a general acceptance of the Accord. Secondly, the ACTU began to see TUTA as a useful instrument to facilitate the ongoing implementation of key Accord matters such as wages, social wage and industry policies. To achieve these ends the ACTU needed TUTA to be a united organisation with a common purpose and focus, rather than an organisation with seven different centres (i.e. Clyde Cameron College and six State TUTA centres) all with their own pseudo-independence and idiosyncrasies that arose from the flexible use of adult education techniques. This task of restructuring TUTA was to take until 1987 to fully achieve, with the ACTU by then completely controlling not only TUTA curriculum but also TUTA methodology. This constituted a major change in the operations and 'educational independence' of TUTA compared to the pre-Accord days illustrated earlier.

The attack on methodology

Initially, it was not so much course curriculum, but the methodology employed by training staff, in particular at the National Centre, which was perceived by the ACTU officials to threaten the acceptance of the Accord process by TUTA course participants. The training methodology employed on TUTA courses up to 1983 was a heavily participant-centred one, based on adult education principles which suggested that adults learn best when the process begins from their own knowledge base and they proceed through experiential methods to a learning outcome. There was concern amongst ACTU officials after 1983 that debate on the Accord by honorary officials (e.g. shop stewards, branch committee persons, etc.) might not be productive. Productive in ACTU's terms meant that all union officials and union members needed to have a positive view of the Accord mechanism and its benefits. Therefore with little, if any, knowledge of adult education principles such as participant-centred learning techniques, and the need for open debate within that process, ACTU officials were suspicious of this type of learning approach. They held the view that open debate and analysis of the Accord process may lead to individuals reaching a conclusion about the Accord that may have been negative. There was also concern (for similar reasons) that TUTA training staff may not be positive about the Accord and/or about the process of how the Accord was arrived at (i.e. without general rank and file involvement).

This raised the fundamental issue of 'what is the purpose of union education?' (Morris, 1991). Up to 1983 this question was largely academic, with TUTA's educational role determined largely within the TUTA hierarchy in theory, but in practice, varying somewhat from centre to centre yet still conforming to participant-centred adult education principles. With the Accord's implementation came a much more strategic role for TUTA in the successful implementation and acceptance of the Accord mechanism and its implications for the role of unions. The ACTU could not risk TUTA remaining free to pursue its open adult education methodology with its emphasis on participant-centred learning leading to wide ranging discussion and debate. The time had come for a more 'mechanistic' type approach to TUTA training specifically geared to achieve goals in respect to union attitudes and operations.

With this in mind a number of conferences were held during 1983 involving ACTU officials and training staff (both State and National) to discuss how the Accord should be introduced into courses and whether debate on it should take place and, if so, how. Training staff generally argued that a fairly open debate on the Accord should take place. This was justified on the basis that unionists, when given the details and philosophy of the Accord, would reach a positive attitude to the Accord following an informed open debate. This process (it was argued) would be much more educationally sound than one based on basically force feeding the Accord and its elements to course participants without debate on its merits. The ACTU concern was that rank and file reaction to its lack of involvement in the development and implementation of the Accord would overshadow the perceived merits of the Accord process (Voll, 1995: 202). Laurie Carmichael in a paper delivered to a National course illustrated the nature of the initial Accord negotiations when he stated:

We (AMWSU) were already ideologically prepared, by changes in our own work, to accept that the concept of the Accord was the direction in which we should go. It also (arose) out of analysing the changes that were taking place in the world economy and in the Australian economy. It was this latter (point) that finally convinced us we had to put our nose into the negotiations that were taking place about the Accord, and not simply leave it to being

negotiated by a few top level people at the ACTU and the Labor Party (Carmichael, 1985: 2).

This clearly indicates that there was little, if any, rank-and-file involvement in the Accord prior to its formal agreement in 1983. The perception by the ACTU therefore was, that in open debate on the Accord, union activists would focus on the lack of consultation and would be negative towards the Accord without really examining its merits. The experience of most TUTA training staff during the early days of the Accord (1983/84) supported the view that there was a significant number of course participants who were anti-Accord because of the lack of rank-and-file consultation over its adoption. Experience also showed that despite the initial negativity of some participants, most, if not all, became quite positive about the benefits of the Accord after informed and open debate. Training staff went to great efforts to convince ACTU officials of, firstly, their own positive attitude to the Accord, and secondly, the merits of their methodology in terms of a positive outlook towards the Accord by course participants who evaluated the Accord in an environment that ensured an informed debate. ACTU officials remained unconvinced. Despite assurances from training staff, it became clear that the ACTU believed it did not have sufficient control over the National program whilst training staff and the National Office were located at Clyde Cameron College in Wodonga, hence the need to restructure TUTA (Voll, 1995: 200-204).

Examples of post-Accord changes

An example of the effect of ACTU intervention in TUTA was illustrated by the abolition of the National Development Course (a major course since TUTA began) (Voll, 1995: 157-161) and its replacement by a new course; the Strategic Unionism Course (Voll, 1995: 191-193). The objectives of the new course differed in two major respects. One was that the objectives were no longer based on development of the person along adult education lines but were entirely instructional and informational. There were no longer any 'participant planned' sessions on the course and the participants were to be told about ACTU and specific union policies and strategies without analysis.

The agenda was set. Secondly, the contents of the course were clearly specified as being ACTU policy, Accord policies and strategies and economic and industrial relations environments within the Accord setting (Voll, 1995: 192). TUTA and its courses had become intricately part of the Accord process. Under this new approach, not only was there no longer room for a participant-centred training approach, but a new style training officer for TUTA was thought to be needed. All of the existing National training staff were either made redundant or relocated and replaced by the new breed of National Industry Development officers. These new staff, employed from 1986 onwards, were hand picked by the ACTU and were all experienced full-time officials. In order to attract the right persons the salary for these officers was significantly higher than that paid to previous National training staff. Few, if any, had any training or adult education experience, nor were they given any, because adult education methodology, emphasising student participation, was no longer seen as important in the newly restructured TUTA. The new Training Staff were each allocated specific Industry sectors and given the task to organise Strategic Unionism Courses and Industry Courses for their particular Industry sector (Voll, 1995: 194-195).

Another example of the post-Accord change in TUTA operations can be seen by examining the Summer Economic Schools. The first school in 1980 and the later ones in 1981 and 1982 were largely modelled on the National Summer Schools organised by ACSPA and the ACTU prior to TUTA becoming operative. They were organised to facilitate wide ranging discussion of major economic, industrial and social issues of importance at the time. To this end a wide ranging list of speakers was organised including politicians (from both sides of politics), senior public servants, industrial relations commissioners, academics (with a variety of political views), other experts (e.g. medical experts) and key union decision-makers. Timed for January to enable as many senior union officials, union activists and rank and file members to attend, they used a mixture of workshops and plenary sessions to encourage as broad a debate as possible. Even though the 1981 and 1982 schools began to focus a little more on the issues and concepts of a Prices and Incomes Policy, epitomised by inputs by Laurie Carmichael in particular, the style and methodology of these schools were similar to the first in 1980. Discussions that foreshadowed the Accord were largely based around the AMWSU publications, *Australia Uprooted*, *Australia Ripped Off* and *Australia on the Rack*. These publications provided a fertile basis for wide-ranging debate on many economic, industrial, political and social issues (Voll, 1995: 196-197).

The Winter School in 1983 (there was no Summer School because of the Special Unions Conference called to endorse the Accord Agreement) and the Summer and Winter Schools of 1984, were organised in quite a different manner to their predecessors. Firstly, they were heavily structured. All sessions (plenary and workshops) were clearly predetermined in purpose and content and run or overseen by an ACTU Executive member, an ACTU official, or a key Government ministerial

adviser. Secondly, the only topics discussed were the Accord and its mechanisms. It was also the only time that the Accord was officially debated in a TUTA sponsored forum after it came into operation. There were no speakers putting any alternative view nor any speakers other than from unions, ACTU or the Federal Labor government. These schools were clearly designed to 'sell' the Accord to any doubters and to explain some of the 'mysteries' of the Accord mechanism to those with 'genuine' questions about its proposed operation. Therefore, these latter schools were markedly different both in style, atmosphere and methodology than previous schools and there was clearly no wide-ranging debate of matters raised. This generated negative feedback from some participants who had been to previous schools. After a poor response (in terms of numbers of participants) to the Winter School in 1984, no more economic schools were held (Voll, 1995:197-199).

The final illustration of the change in TUTA was the new National course profile in 1988/89 and the change in the numbers of participants on these courses. The Industrial Skills Program, the Job Representative Course Program and the International program all remained largely similar (in terms of number of participants) between the years 1984/85 and 1988/89. However in the Development Program (restructured to become the Strategic Union courses) participation dropped from 155 participants in 1984/85 to 10 in 1988/89. These figures indicated that the new style Strategic Union courses did not meet the needs of those for whom they were aimed. It might also have indicated that the lack of training experience by the new National Industry Development Officers (who were responsible for running these courses) was significant in these types of courses. The most massive change in participation came in the Industry/Single Union program. Here the participation rose from 408 in 1984/85 to 1954 in 1988/89. These courses were shorter than the other National TUTA courses (ranging from three to five days) and focused strongly on Industry policy and Award Restructuring implementation. This meant that they were tightly structured courses employing a 'mechanistic' approach to training and more easily able to be handled by the new National Industry Development Officers (TUTA, 1988/89: 9).

The restructuring of TUTA was completed by relocating the National Administration of TUTA from Clyde Cameron College, Wodonga to Melbourne during 1986/87 (initially to offices in St Kilda Rd and then to ACTU House in Swanston St) and removing remaining (those not made redundant) National Training Staff from Clyde Cameron College and stationing them in either Melbourne or Sydney.

The outcome of ACTU intervention

Therefore, the type of change that began to be felt from 1983 onwards was of a fundamentally different nature than that which reflected periodic, internal TUTA reviews of union skills and priorities required by the union movement. Essentially, there was a takeover of TUTA as an organisation by the ACTU in order to change it from a rather loose federation of seven largely independent centres with their individual styles but generally broadly common methodology, into a centrally controlled unitary organisation that could be used by the ACTU to facilitate the implementation of ACTU and Accord policies and strategies. The ACTU achieved this takeover by becoming pro-active in TUTA administration through its Executive Board, by changing and modifying course programs (in particular the National Program), by moving the National Administration of TUTA from Wodonga to Melbourne, by relocating or making redundant National Training Staff and by hiring a new type of National Training Officer (Voll, 1995: 199-200).

Again, the issue of what style of methodology TUTA employed concerned the question posed earlier — 'what is the purpose of union education?' TUTA and TUTA training staff essentially believed that the purpose was to develop and educate individual unionists by employing adult education principles which were participant-centred and which empowered individuals with the knowledge and skills to operate successfully within the union movement in a rapidly changing environment. The ACTU on the other hand believed that in order to successfully implement the Accord processes and the evolving changes in later versions of the Accord, a tightly structured 'mechanistic' approach to training was appropriate which focussed on information exchange and discussion of strategy to achieve its corporate objectives. This approach to union education was one where the end justified the means and, in terms of the longevity of the Accord process, appeared to have been successful. It can be argued that probably both types of training methodology were successful for different reasons. Firstly, the participant-centred training approach essentially established TUTA's credentials within the union movement up to about 1983, and was instrumental in promoting a training ethos amongst the majority of unions thereby enabling TUTA to be a prominent player in union affairs. Secondly, the re-organisation of TUTA that began after 1983, and the change in methodology, absorbed TUTA into the corporatist nature of the Accord process and it became a key instrument in the successful adoption of the Accord process in Australia. This latter success,

however, was achieved at the expense of TUTA becoming a 'partisan' institution.

After 1983, an enormous amount of resource material for both training staff and trade union officials was produced, including a glossy resource folder called 'Unions in Accord' which was made available for all unions (both State and Federal) in Australia. This reflected the importance of the Accord and further highlighted the significant role that TUTA would play in 'selling' the Accord process within the union movement. One interesting matter to note is that from 1983/84 the materials (particularly audio-visual material) produced by TUTA were focused much more narrowly on specific Accord-related matters as compared to the more generic type materials produced previously. Examples of this included films/videos such as *Unions in Accord*, *Bill Kelty on Award Restructuring*, *The Big Picture* and *Confronting the Future*. There was no longer any concern by TUTA, the ACTU or unions about TUTA being politically neutral and non-partisan. In fact, TUTA was required to be pro-Accord and pro-ACTU policy (Voll, 1995: 209-210). TUTA, like individual unions had to conform to the corporatist strategies of the ACTU and the government for the common good. For TUTA this meant abandoning its non-partisan educational independence which had enabled it to be accepted firstly, by the majority of unions and, secondly (if somewhat grudgingly), by the Fraser government.

By the time the Coalition Parties developed their 'Fightback' manifesto, there was no longer any doubt that TUTA had moved from being an independent federally-funded Statutory Authority which serviced the educational needs of individual unionists to an organisation that formed an integral part of the corporate Accord strategy of the ACTU and the Labor government. So, it was relatively easy for the 'Fightback' proposals to justify the abolition of TUTA. In order to prepare for this eventuality and in anticipation of the Government being defeated at the 1993 Federal elections, TUTA was pared back to core staff in Sydney and Melbourne with which the ACTU would be able to cope both organisationally and financially. The role envisaged for the remnants of TUTA was to become the promotional arm of the ACTU providing ACTU sanitised information to affiliates on a range of issues of current concern (e.g. the impact of the *Industrial Relations Reform Act 1993*) and advising individual unions on their internal training programs, where appropriate.

Whether TUTA would have survived the Howard government's reforms if it had maintained its pre-Accord operations and educationally independent curriculum and methodology is problematical. However, a more important question might be whether the change to union attitudes in relation to union training that TUTA appeared to have achieved during its first 8-10 years by its neutrality have been largely negated by the educationally unsound training policies of the last 10 years? This question may well be answered in the next few years by observing how successful unions are in reversing the decline in union density and their own influence in the new post-Workplace Relations Bill environment.

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