

fsu@work

.nab fsu member magazine

**SIGN UP AND
GO PLACES**

See page 8



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July 2002

Joy wins legal
battle.
PFG in the
spotlight





Statement with Tony Beck

Members decide on pay

Negotiations towards a new enterprise agreement with the National have taken a big step forward with the release of the bank's pay offer.

FSU members will have the opportunity to meet and

discuss this offer over the coming weeks.

The National wants to reach an agreement on pay - and importantly on staffing and targets.

The bank accepts that the majority of the staff want a new agreement with improved pay, workloads and target outcomes.

Less than 50 cents extra

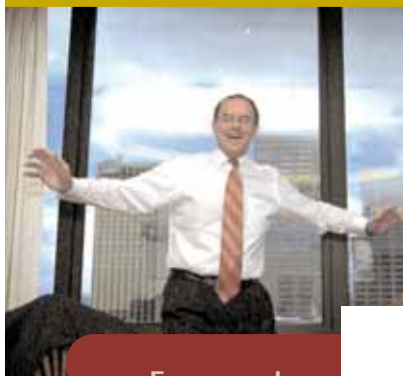
Union dues will rise from 1st July, with full-time members being asked to pay an extra 48 cents per fortnight. We are aware that every cent counts in household budgets, and assure you that the increase is absolutely necessary to keep working effectively.

Strategies for Strength is the theme of the forthcoming FSU Biennial Conference. It is about making the union more relevant and stronger in your workplace. Conference will also be deciding on ways to involve you more in shaping the direction of the union (see page 7).

The best way to make the union stronger is to attract more members. Between now and 30 September 2002, every new member, and the member who nominates them, will get a free cinema pass plus the chance to win a fabulous Fiji holiday package - (see page 8).

Finally, welcome to the new look FSU@Work magazine. It will be published in July and November of each year, joining our Annual Report and faxed Updates in our program of member communications.

Tony Beck
FSU National Secretary



Express Lane

WE COULDN'T RESIST

Send us your suggestions for a wicked caption for this photograph and you could win two movie tickets. We'll publish your best answers in the next edition. Send to Communications Unit, FSU, GPO Box 2829AA, Melbourne VIC 3001 or fax (03) 9602 1235.

A BRANCH CLOSURE WORTH SUPPORTING

Typically a bank branch closure is a negative thing - except when it's because there aren't enough people to staff the workplace safely. Lack of staff and poorly assigned relief closed the NAB Glenroy branch earlier this year.

FSU members refused to open their unsafe workplace until appropriate numbers of staff were sent to their branch. Members contacted the FSU to advise the action they were taking and soon after, miraculously, NAB managed to locate additional staff for the branch to be opened by 10am.

Well done to the members at Glenroy for sticking together and taking a stand. Security and safety should always come first.

THANKS FOR THE HELPING HAND

When Rachel Hill was put on performance management and accused of deliberately not doing her work she had reason to be angry and upset. At the time she suffered from a severe health problem.

'The way I was treated added to my illness, which was the last thing I needed,' she told FSU@Work.

Rachel contacted the union and the FSU worked with the Bank's manager of operations to relocate her to a more suitable position.

'I am so grateful. The manager took the time to listen and I feel he really understands me. Since the shift it has been a pleasure to come to work!'

Rachel was now considering going full time, but may be losing her job due to PFG!

HARD ACT TO FOLLOW



Father and son act, Purple Hayes have been bringing the house down with their song inspired by NABs rural branch closures, while

the Golden Arches open their branches.

'We performed the song at the Port Fairy Folk Festival this year, and it really touched a chord with the audience, says Garry Hayes - the father and composer of:

"Coming To A Town Near You"!

*'They've replaced our bank with a fast food chain
No long term interest just short term gain
There's money in making us overweight
While the bank fees continue to escalate.*

*'One giant moves out, while another moves in
Strategic profits, they think its no sin
Shareholders are the God they obey
While the locals grow poorer - day by day'.*

PAY OFFER IN MEMBERS' HANDS

FSU members across the National will be the judge of the NAB's recent pay offer.

An information package has gone to union reps and members will be meeting in their workplaces over the coming weeks.

FSU National Secretary Tony Beck said there had been a massive break through in negotiations with the National and the union wanted the members to decide on the pay offer.

FSU members and the bank have been in dispute over a new agreement for 18 months.

Mr Beck said the members' support for the People First campaign had ultimately lead to the pay break through.

'It's hard for the bank to ignore over 6,000 signatures and thousands of members taking stopwork action.'

Mr Beck said that workloads and staffing continued to be the top issues, but that the Bank was 'moving in the right direction'.

Highlights of the offer include:

- 4.5% increase each year for three years
- Lowest paid employees could get the biggest pay rise (employees in minimum rates can get up to 7%)
- Wage increase covers all employees
- In principle, commitments on better workloads, staffing and training, leading to better service for customers.

More details are available at the members' meeting and at the website - www.fsunion.org.au

Photo: Urs Bucher



(L to R) Sandra Death, Timothy Williamson and Kerry Elford are just 3 in 6,000 members who signed a petition telling NAB why members want to be consulted about the EA.

6,200 SIGNATURES IN PETITION SUCCESS

If all the FSU petitions were lined up end to end, they would stretch for nearly 1.5 kilometres!

Petitions were received from over 1000 workplaces across the nation.

Tony Beck, FSU National Secretary, said the petition really impressed management at the National.

'They came back to negotiations convinced that the workforce wanted a new enterprise agreement,' he said.

'Thanks must go out to the 6,200 NAB staff who signed the petition. You really had a big impact.

Mr Beck said the petition also helped the National understand why members wanted to be consulted about the enterprise agreement.

'The petition proved that members were interested and wanted a say on the detail.'

ACT OF GOD, DISASTER OR BOTH?

A Victorian Tribunal has ruled that bank closures should be classified in the disaster category alongside floods, fires and earthquakes.

This follows an appeal by a disgruntled CBA customer about the closure of his local branch. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal told the customer the closure was an 'act of God' and unavoidable.

The tribunal was satisfied that bank closures could be grouped in the disaster category.

Disaster yes! But we are not sure that the big four bosses - Ciccutto, McFarlane, Morgan and Murray - rate as gods!

Hearsay: Sex and overtime

Long working hours are leaving Australians too tired for sex, according to ACTU Secretary Greg Combet.

Addressing the national Press Club last month, Mr Combet said excessive hours and lack of job security had hurt every aspect of family life - include sex!

For more Hearsay on work issues, see page 7

My Account



AFTER 30 YEARS AS A UNION MEMBER

After 30 years 6 months and 28 days with NAB I have left on stress-related medical grounds.

I have been a member of the union since approx 1973 and whilst having limited need for the services of the union I have watched as it has grown from a fairly mundane group to one which is now leading the way in the fight for its members' rights.

The bank's executives have simply lost the plot in regards to its role as a service provider to the public despite the rhetoric it puts out to all and sundry. Worse still is the manner it treats its people - their most important asset.

The executives do not realise the hurt they are causing the honest hard working bankers and their families through excessive demands for unrealistic sales targets.

It is funny that the work/life balance is being put forward by the banks as a major reform when NAB business bankers are working 70-80hr per week just to keep up.

Anyway that's my lot and I thank the union and I will watch with interest how enterprise agreement negotiations go.

Name withheld on request

THRILLS AND SPILLS - THE PFG

Have you ever been on a roller coaster? The views can be great, but there's the inevitable fall - scream with delight, cry out in horror, close your eyes or take in the view - everyone is different!

National's Positioning for Growth is not unlike a roller coaster ride - some of you wished it never happened, others can't wait to get off, while the intrepid hold on tight for the ride.

We spoke to six members about their PFG roller coaster ride -this is their personal view from the roller coaster.

Uncertainty the worst part



Name: Craig Rich

Title: Senior Operations Analyst

Workplace: Duties: ATM, eftpos, internet and phone banking operations maintenance

Duration in role: 10 months

'PFG will directly result in a mass number of job losses across the National. While the retrenchments in my department

have been voluntary, we are down a further 8% in staff numbers, which in turn increases the workload of those staff that remain.

When PFG was rolled out, the bank tried to keep people informed, though at the time there was also a lot of misinformation floating around.

Whilst waiting for the number of job losses to be announced from my department, staff were greatly concerned with their current performance and any actions that they took.

The whole exercise caused a great deal of anxiety. One colleague's wife was regularly in tears as she was worried sick that her husband was going to lose his job. My wife and I also felt the pressure in that many hours of sleep were given up to evaluating what options I had for other employment. Many hours of normally productive worktime were spent by staff discussing what was happening and what impact it may have to them and their families future. With the previous loss of staff and now with PFG

on the move, it has put even more pressure on us, especially because there maybe a change to our shift rosters, which are presently under review. The shift roster which we have been following for many years has become unworkable according to the bank. This review currently underway may mean that staff will end up having to work more weekends than they currently do. Most people need a certain level of social interaction to lead a well balanced work/life existence. The longer the uncertainty goes on about the PFG, it becomes more difficult to manage life around family and friends.

Positioning for closures

Members from two Victorian Branches set to close later this year give their thoughts.

Branch A: 'We were told around Easter that our branch is earmarked for closure in mid-August. Because we're 50kms from any big town, and therefore a self-sufficient branch, we are often forgotten about - a little tough under the current circumstances. The only time anyone has called since the announcement has been if someone's sales are too low! I contacted them a few times about redundancy and was made to feel like an inconvenience. It's like we're in a black hole, just waiting for the days to tick down.

'I called the union in the first couple of days. Nothing was too much trouble. I couldn't sleep for weeks and had continuous headaches. I think without the union, we would have all been on stress leave. Thanks FSU!!!'

Branch B: 'Week 1 and 2 we couldn't sleep and were really stressed out. For the first 6 weeks we were both kept in limbo about our jobs, which made it very hard to make any decisions (eg other work offers).

'Staff morale dropped because we felt let down and worried about our futures. It was hard to be our usual bright and chatty selves and to promote the bank in a positive light. For us the bank can't close fast enough. Neither of us want to work for NAB anymore. We won't miss the bank but will miss our small community and each other.

'Most of our customers have decided to leave the NAB, especially considering the bank announced the closure the same week they announced the 2 billion dollar profit!

G ROLLER COASTER RIDE

Morale is back to normal for most



Name: Craig Gethin
Title: Account Service Manager
Duration in role: 10 months

'For me PFG has been one of the best rolled-out initiatives for NAB. Within one week of announcing it, my Senior Managers came West to explain what it meant to us face to face, followed by Ian MacDonald who

came to see if the message got around and was understood. Ian MacDonald has been well-received by all staff. People see him as positive, he shows empathy and relates to the staff, this is a pleasant change from previous leadership communications last year!

'From an AMS point of view, centralisation was the main concern as it directly impacts the AMS staff in WA. The changes have been well communicated, but it has not been easy for some of the staff, issues like 'will I have a job' and 'how much longer will we be here' have a wearing affect on people and no doubt their families. At least with the initial rollout of PFG now complete a lot of the rumour and wondering is now past us and we have this very real change coming over the next 2 years to train and prepare ourselves for. Morale is back to normal.

'When Centralisation does come we have firm commitments from all Senior Management that staff will be dealt with fairly and of course in these situations, some want to stay, some want to go. The trick is to understand everyone's personal expectations and try and meet these while meeting the businesses goals. Everyone has a different life situation and different priorities; some people do want to stay and progress, others will stay to the end and leave happily. It is fair to say that PFG and its messages have proven to be a good thing for AMS WA - so far.'

After 30 years ...

Name: Name withheld on request
Workplace: AMS Sydney
Duration in role: 30+ years

'We had an idea last September that AMS would be centralising to Melbourne over a 12-month period. We haven't been told which functions will go and which will move, which means we don't know whose job is at risk. We just have to sit and wait, and see what eventuates.

'We have though, been encouraged by NAB to look online (NAB's career section on the web) at applying for other jobs. There's talk of a takeover, which may slow down the PFG process - who knows?

'Even though all is up in the air and we've been given no timelines or assurance, most of us aren't too stressed. I can't speak for others, but we have been treated quite tenderly. Ian McDonald has been forthright, and said we want the EA signed, sealed and delivered. He also took market rates off the agenda, which scored him points. The only problem is we are being told to share NAB's vision, but we don't yet know what it is!

I have been here for over 30 years. I may take a package if it suits, but I am happy to see what happens.

Down to business

Name: Mark Lynam
Title: Account Services Manager
Workplace: Brisbane
Duration in role: Nearly two years

'PFG to date has been more about increased fees in many areas. We've seen an introduction of a monthly fee for Business On-line with little justification as to why this was introduced.

'The major effect to date is the scrapping of relieving managers and the expectations on Business Banking Officers to relieve in these roles and a relieving BBO to fill their positions. There are still many uncertainties with the change and many concerns, such as the expectations on BBO's in the role as far as sales targets etc.

'The Bank wants to recruit new BBOs to cover the requirements, however these will have limited training and therefore put more pressure on the full-time BBO.

'If the Bank was serious about training they would give us time to do this.'

Photo: Kyle-Jane Hunt



Carl Ferguson, Tracey and their kids, Nathan and Ashlee, say PFG has been a mix of ups and downs.

PFG = Packed For Getaway

Name: Anita Downes
Title: AMS, WA
Duration in role: 4 weeks

'I spoke with a few AMS long-timers about the future for AMS WA and I got the general feeling that everyone was happy with the info they got in advance. Some said PFG was inevitable due to technology.

'AMS is full of long-serving staff members who love their work and the fact that they are worlds away from "branch land". Not many wish to go back to branches, but most look forward to the future and the changes it will bring.

'Regarding the threat to their jobs, not too many are concerned. The long-timers at AMS WA are looking forward to the redundancy package on offer, or perhaps a transfer to Melbourne or to Lending Services in Perth. Many staff here are women who are looking forward to the change, and the redundancy gives them the opportunity to try out life at home with the kids after so many years on the job. I feel that maybe people are past caring. They are experienced people who have seen so many changes and are ready to pack it in when the time comes, whatever the consequences.

'The main concern that everybody expressed including myself is that the branches in WA will miss out on local service. Nobody really believes that the service levels of today will be maintained by the east coast, as with any other involving profit over people - it's in the hands of the big fellas in Melbourne.

'I joined AMS 4 weeks ago for a break from the branches. I took a \$12 cut in my fortnightly pay to shed responsibility and pressure, and to work what I consider to be better hours. I transferred knowing that AMS was closing and feeling assured that I would have the opportunity to train up for something else within the bank or outside. I am not concerned for myself, I have never really considered NAB to be a lifetime employer. Those days are long gone.

Ambition



Knowing the tricks of the job search game can give you the advantage.

Here are the top hints from the FSU Career Centre:

1. Most finance vacancies aren't advertised in newspapers.
2. Employers expect resumes to be tailored to the job.
3. It's completely acceptable not to put your age or marital status in your resume.
4. The key to performing well in an interview is in the preparation you do before you get there.
5. The person who gets the job offer is usually the person who performs best in the interview, rather than the person who is most qualified/experienced for the job.
6. Financial advisers and people with lending and superannuation experience are currently in high demand.
7. Finance employers prefer candidates with tertiary qualifications for almost all jobs.
8. Being able to prove that you have good communication and interpersonal skills is critical.

Visit the FSU Finance Careers Centre at www.fsunion.org.au where you can search for finance job vacancies and get up-to-date advice to help with your resume, job search and interview preparation.

If you're looking for a job in Melbourne, register with our employment agency, FSU Employment. Call 1300 366 378 to tap into our professional network and get help updating your resume and finding a new position.

Proudly boasting the biggest workload in Australia.

seek.com.au No. 1 for the job.

Photo: Kyle-Jane Hunt



Holly Richardson, member from IMA, enjoys her Dine Out discount at Vialetto - check their menu out at www.vialetto.com.au.

Express Lane



FSU DINE OUT AND SAVE MONEY

With the FSU Dine Out card, members get big discounts on meals and accommodation at over 1,000 restaurants and great hotels.

FSU member Holly Richardson (pictured at Vialetto in Melbourne) says the 20% discount means one night out pays for a whole year's worth of great benefits.

The card is easy to get and use. Members can purchase cards from the FSU for \$16.50 by completing the application form mailed with this magazine. Then it's a simple matter of choosing a restaurant from the extensive list and making a booking! Most restaurants offer 20% off (up to \$25) and most hotel room rates are 50% cheaper than rack.

FSU@Work took a sneak peak at the list on-line and found some great offers, including:

- ◆ Melbourne's bustling city: Zucchini, JJ's at Crown, Hairy Canary and funky Rhumaralla's
- ◆ Perth's popular Northbridge area: La Zippola, Denpasar Moon, The Greek and Vino Vino
- ◆ Adelaide's trendy North Adelaide area: Beyond India, Coco Corner Thai, Ha Long Bay and sophisticated Katts.

Call FSU Member Benefits on 1 300 366 378 for more information.

COULD YOU BE A WORKPLACE REP?

Take this quiz to find out if you qualify.

1. Are you an FSU member? Yes / No
2. Do you think employees should be treated with dignity and respect? Yes / No
3. Are you keen to see achievable workloads, realistic targets and fair pay? Yes / No
4. Are you interested in learning some new skills, like negotiating, facilitating meetings and communication? Yes / No
5. Would you like to develop the confidence to represent yourself and your colleagues with your manager? Yes / No

If you answered yes to three or more of these questions, we want to have a chat with you. Call your union office and find out more about becoming an FSU workplace rep.

COMPARE MEMBER ADVANTAGE HEALTH AND SAVE

Member Advantage Health provides you with a choice of private hospital insurance policies at highly competitive rates. Compare our rates, just like the following comparison with two major competitors, and see the savings for yourself.

*Top Hospital Family cover with no excess (yearly)					
Health Fund	VIC	NSW	SA	QLD	WA
*Member Advantage Health	\$1,513.03	\$1,236.85	\$1,299.40	\$1,236.00	\$1,154.95
*Health Fund One	\$1,877.65	\$1,435.45	\$1,620.25	\$1,599.70	\$1,332.00
SAVING	\$364.62	\$198.60	\$320.85	\$363.70	\$177.05
*Health Fund Two	\$1,817.05	\$1,401.25	\$1,460.65	\$1,551.45	\$1,240.50
SAVING	\$304.02	\$164.40	\$161.25	\$315.45	\$85.55

30% Federal Government rebate reduced from premiums *Contributions rates have been compiled from publicly available information Rates current as at 6 May 2002.

Member Advantage Health also offers you a selection of Dental and Ancillary tables that return member benefits based on the actual cost of the service up to the generous benefit maximums. Choose either 60%, 70% or 80% Dental/Ancillary packages.

For more information, contact FSU Member Advantage on 1300 853 362 or visit our website www.member-advantage.com/fsu

UNION MEMBERS GET MORE

Union members earn up to 43% more than non-members, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics data. The latest stats show that union members earn an average of 15% or \$99 a week more than their non-union counterparts.

Union membership up

Latest data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that for the second year running, the number of workers who belong to a union has increased. According to the bureau there were 1,902,700 union members in Australia in August 2002 - 900 more than 12 months earlier.

Women learn more about unions

The Anna Stewart Memorial Project is an on-the-job training experience for women, providing the opportunity to find out more about how unions work.

During the two weeks of the project, participants attend formal training sessions, where they can meet each other, discuss their experiences and expectations and learn about trade union organisation and issues. For more, please call Annie on 03 9261 5400.

Australia and US lag on maternity leave

After July, when New Zealand legislation comes into force, Australia and America will be the only two countries in the Organisation for Economic Corporation and Development (OECD) not offering mandatory paid leave when women take time off to give birth.

The ACTU is preparing a claim in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission seeking a minimum standard 14 weeks' paid maternity leave, which would keep in line with International Labour Organisation standards.

Hearsay

St George: Staff at a branch were told to buy their own toilet paper - apparently they use more than their quota!

Westpac (BME): Opening hours might change back to 9.30 am!

ANZ: Hearsay has discovered the ANZ's criteria for branch closure: a/ near an industrial area, b/ near a shopping centre or c/ near another branch - No wonder staff are a bit concerned!

ANZ: CBS Help Desk is moving off-shore to Fiji, sounds like this is happening in the next couple of months as staff are on redeployment now.

NAB: Does anyone know anything about the rumored Christmas party allowance that, if it does exist, nobody ever sees?

STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTH



Photo: Kyle-Jane-Hunt

In September delegates from across the country will converge in Melbourne for the FSU Biennial

Conference 2002. Over two days of speakers, workshops and debates, the delegates will decide the first steps in a union wide program to help make the union more relevant and effective in the workplace.

When Lisa Guy, FSU rep at ANZ Burnie (northern Tasmania), teamed up with her workmates to protest cuts to part-time staff hours, they got stronger and many hours got saved!

When Pam Nicholas, FSU rep at NRMA Perth, and her colleagues claimed back pay together, they got stronger and they got their back pay!

When FSU members Doug Bastian and Leanne Black (pictured above) at Cardlink, Melbourne, spoke up against a non-union agreement, they got stronger and the non-union agreement went down like a lead balloon!

Members working together can be a powerful force for good in their workplaces. Team work can improve staffing, workloads, targets, training and family-friendly policies!

But there are some alarming trends that need to be faced by the FSU.

While there are nearly 2 million Australian union members, the proportion of the workforce who are members is the lowest ever - just 25% of employees. In the finance sector, union membership is 24.3%.

Australia wide union membership has remained static while the workforce has grown. Likewise, in finance and banking, union membership has not kept pace with employment growth. Higher levels of employment loss in banking, where union membership rates are higher, have exacerbated the negative trend.

While membership has fallen, the need for unions has increased. Industrial and employment laws are more complex and more biased towards the employers. The rapid pace of industry change has dramatically increased pressures on staff. Job security has withered as mass redundancies, out-sourcing and casual employment become common employer strategies.

Day-to-day work in finance and banking is harder than ever before. There are more sales pressures and shifting targets, longer hours and more unpaid overtime, plus toxic levels of customer dissatisfaction and antagonism.

The FSU Conference will face these issues and look for strategies to strengthen the union, especially in the workplace.

Most importantly, conference will be looking at ways to involve you in the discussion and ultimately in the revitalisation of the union at your workplace.

It's likely that throughout 2003, all FSU members will be invited to have their say on the new strategies. This may happen through workplace meetings, forums for reps or discussion groups on the website. Watch for the November edition of FSU@Work for full details.

One thing is for certain - the strategies for strength begin with you.

Got an item for Conference?

Members are invited to submit items for discussion at this year's Conference.

Agenda items must be approved by Branch Committee and submitted to the National Secretary no later than 31 July 2002.

Contact your Branch Secretary for more information.



Photographer: Fiji Visitors' Bureau - Suva

SIGN UP AND GO PLACES

Join or recruit a friend before 30 September 2002 and win!

Everyone wins a cinema ticket and joins in the draw for a fabulous Fiji 7 day holiday package for two.

Imagine 7 fabulous days in Fiji

The grand prize includes: Adult economy class return airfare tickets from nearest capital city; 6 nights accommodation at the 'Fijian' resort; airport transfers; breakfast; and travel insurance.

Exclusions: Transport to and from departure point, visas, passports, taxes, meals other than

breakfast and all other ancillary costs are the responsibility of the winner. The trip must be taken by 14 October 2003 and departure is subject to the availability of bookings and flights.

Each new member and a nominated member will receive a Village / Greater Union pass.

The promotion is open to members of the Finance Sector Union of Australia (FSU) who 'recruit' a new member to the FSU between 1 July 2002 and 30 September 2002 and those new members recruited between 1 July 2002 and 30 September 2002. Employees and officials of the FSU and their immediate families are not eligible to enter. / The promotion commences on 1 July 2002 and entries close at 5 pm 30 September 2002. / The prize winner will be selected by draw from the names of eligible members of the FSU. The major draw for the major prize will take place on 14 October 2002 at 3 pm AEST at FSU, 321 Pitt Street, Sydney. The prize winner will be notified by mail and their name and address (city of residence) will be published in "The Australian" on Friday, 18 October 2002. The winner's name and work location will also be published on the FSU website on 15 October 2002 / Total prize value is \$3630.12. / The trip must be taken by 14 October 2003 and departure is subject to the availability of bookings and flights. If the winner cannot use the prize by 14 October 2003, the winner will forfeit the prize and the Promoter will not be liable or responsible to the winner in any way. / No special entry form is required. All people commencing membership during the 'promotion period' will be automatically entered into the competition upon receipt of the membership application form. / The judge's decision in relation to any aspect of the promotion is final and binding on every person who enters. No correspondence will be entered into. All prizes must be taken as offered and are not transferable. The prizes are not redeemable for cash. / The collection, use and disclosure of personal information provided in connection with this promotion will be handled in accordance with the Privacy Act 1988 and the FSU Privacy Policy (a copy of which can be obtained by contacting the FSU). / The Promoter shall not be liable for any loss or damage whatsoever which is suffered (including but not limited to indirect or consequential loss) or for personal injury which is suffered or sustained, in connection with any prize offered, except for any liability which cannot be excluded by law. / The Promoter is Finance Sector Union of Australia, ABN 27843406938 of 341 Queen St, Melbourne, Vic, 3000, Ph: 03 9261 5300. / Authorised under NSW Permit No. TPL 02/05414, A.C.T. Permit No. TP02/2148, N.T. Permit No NT02/1868, S.A. Permit No. T02/2116.

Photo: News Ltd



Joy Buckland, FSU President, at the Federal Court after winning her legal battle with the ANZ. The court found the bank acted unlawfully when it threatened her with the sack.

SHE'S A JOY FOREVER

The recent Federal Court case involving FSU President Joy Buckland prompted Sydney Morning Herald columnist Adele Horin to write this tribute to our home grown hero.

Joy Buckland is a member of an endangered species. It's called Australians Who Take a Stand. In Australia increasingly covered by government vendetta, corporate policy and academic vulnerability, Buckland is a national treasure.

You may have missed the news that Buckland won a Federal Court case recently that vindicated her right to free speech. An ANZ bank manager, employed for 26 years, Buckland has been an outspoken advocate for bank employees in her capacity as honorary president of the Finance Sector Union. The bank tried to gag her and threatened her with dismissal if she continued to speak to the media. Justice Murray Wilcox ruled the ANZ had breached the Workplace Relations Act by threatening to sack her. Buckland said afterwards: 'You get people in all jobs saying they are afraid to speak up.'

That has never been her way. I remember my surprise at her outspokenness when I've rung in the past for a comment.

'There's psychological warfare going on in banks,' she once told me. 'Pressure to do more with less ... Just last week a manager threatened to replace female staff with temps.'

This kind of fearless speech is almost extinct in Australian public life; this kind of passion informed by facts. People in a position to take a stand are minding their backs, their funding, their security. Their lips are zipped, or

their words tempered. If helpful, they beg for anonymity. They are worried about the repercussions, and you can't blame them. Dissent is becoming a perilous business.

The Federal Government made an example of dissenting organisations in 1998-99. It withdrew funding from several organisations that had caused trouble, among them the Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition, National Shelter, a low-income housing lobby group, and the Australian Pensioners' and Superannuants' Federation. In particular, this move silenced the dissenting voice of youth. (The Youth Roundtable, which the Government has set up, is a joke.)

As a condition of funding, the Government had required peak bodies such as the Australian Council of Social Services to provide it with at least 24 hours notice of any press statements. This was slightly watered down in the end, but the Government still gets enough forewarning to pre-empt bad press.

WE NEED THE OUTSPOKEN

Right now many community organisations need to be outspoken as several, including Meals on Wheels services, disability services, community legal centres and youth refuges, face closure or reduced capacity due to the Federal Government's refusal to meet increased salary costs won under a new industrial award. Some groups are afraid to take a stand. Migrant and refugee services have been especially reluctant to go public about their plight because of fears the Federal Government may cut off their funding completely.

With terror in the air, the rationalisation for a clampdown on free speech is greater still. The Prime Minister, John Howard, took an air of moral superiority to China recently. He boasted to the Chinese that Australia in the 1950s had rejected a ban on the Communist Party: that's the kind of open society we are. Back home his Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, was defending an anti-terrorist bill that would allow him to proscribe any organisation. He had originally planned to jail journalists who reported unauthorised disclosures, as well.

Passionate debate is a wonderful and necessary thing in a democracy. Currently, passion is the purview of radio shock-jocks. They fill the air with mock outrage, based on wild misrepresentation. That's not the kind of passion I'm talking about.

Joy Buckland is the real thing, passionate and well-informed. She's prepared to take a stand, and she won't be silenced. She's a rare creature indeed.

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