

Good reasons to join the Alliance

With the Howard government's amendments to the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* ('WorkChoices') in March 2006, the good working conditions that Australians have enjoyed for more than a century suffered a heavy blow.

Although the new Labor government has introduced legislation amending that Act and abolishing Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs), the changes do not completely restore employees' rights. New AWAs are prohibited, but the legislation allows employers who have even one employee on an AWA to continue to use an 'individual transitional employment agreement' (ITEA) until 2010. The ITEAs are similar in many respects to AWAs, and existing AWAs will remain in place up until 2012.

In addition to ten national employment standards containing very basic rights (such as maximum hours of work; long service leave, annual leave, public holidays), the *Workplace Relations Amendment (Transition to Forward with Fairness) Act 2008* also contains provisions for the Australian Industrial Relations Commission to begin a process making the award system 'simpler' and 'more flexible'. This is likely to involve a reduction in the number of awards, and may also reduce the protections provided by awards—something that the Howard government was intent on doing had it retained power. Most of the provisions of WorkChoices will remain intact under the ALP. The need for unions has by no means diminished with the election of the new government.

Transition to Forward with Fairness is only the first step. Labor's substantive legislation is to be introduced later in 2008. This legislation will address other matters, including freedom of association; collective bargaining; equal pay and non-discrimination; good faith bargaining and industrial action; unfair dismissal, and other matters. For example, it *may* restore the right of people in a workplace employing fewer than 100 to pursue an unfair dismissal claim if sacked, though the legislation that passed the parliament in March 2008 does not.

Most in-house editors are on individual (common law) contracts—not AWAs, but not collective (enterprise bargaining) agreements either. For those editors, nothing has changed. The most effective way to negotiate salaries in line with our qualifications and skills is by a collective agreement. A union can help to negotiate such an agreement, and it has the experience and background knowledge to ask the right questions and be sure that matters such as occupational health and safety are taken into consideration.

It's time we put our heads together to achieve what we deserve. A union can only act for its members, and it's only by being part of a union that any person can influence its priorities.

What about freelancers?

Freelance editors must negotiate their own fees, and those fees must take into account taxes; expenses such as office supplies, hardware and software, and an Internet connection; updating skills through training; marketing and advertising initiatives (such as a website); and saving for retirement. If they have a registered business, income must also cover business taxes, and possibly accounting fees. Though a very frugal person may be able to make ends meet by charging on the basis of \$50 per hour, most of us cannot—especially given the sometimes sporadic nature of freelance work. Keeping editorial pay low by agreeing to work for such rates is a disservice to our profession. Although freelancers work for themselves, communication and collective agreement are the means to better pay for high-quality work.

A union is as strong as its members

The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance is the union for people working in the areas of media, communications, entertainment, and the arts—and that includes the publishing industries. Through the Alliance, people come together to demonstrate that strength comes from numbers, and by working together we have the strength to change things we cannot change on our own.

Registered with the Australian Industrial Relations Commission and in each state, the Alliance is the officially recognised body representing members on all industrial matters, including negotiating our agreements and providing advice on contracts. It uses its influence to lobby government and other industry bodies for strong and independent Australian media, publishing and entertainment industries.

How much does it cost?

Alliance membership fees are on a sliding scale according to income, with the expectation that a person's membership fees will be approximately 1–2% of his or her annual income.

The Alliance is offering a **membership discount** for all members of Australian Societies of Editors. This discount began at the start of the 2006–07 financial year and continues. New or existing members of the Alliance can receive an amount off their membership fee equivalent to the amount of their Society membership, with proof in the form of a tax receipt.

You need to notify the Alliance at the start of each financial year to continue to receive the discount: e-mail members@alliance.org.au or call 1300 65 65 13.

How to join

Complete the membership form, seal in an envelope and post to:
Alliance Membership Centre, Locked Bag 526, Spring Hill QLD 4004.

Alliance membership fees

Alliance membership fees are levied annually according to your income and what section of the industry you work in. The Media section (formerly AJA) is the one applicable to editors.

Members of Societies of Editors in all Australian states and territories are entitled to an annual discount equivalent to the amount of their Society's annual membership fee.

Annual income	Alliance fee level	Amount payable (before Society of Editors discount)	Amount payable with Society of Editors (Vic) discount
\$5000–\$14,999	Level 2	\$5.20 per week (\$270.00 per year)	\$3.75 per week (\$195.00 per year)
\$15,000–\$29,999	Level 3	\$7.10 per week (\$369.00 per year)	\$5.65 per week (\$294.00 per year)
\$30,000–\$59,999	Level 4	\$10.40 per week (\$541.00 per year)	\$8.96 per week (\$466.00 per year)
\$60,000–\$77,999	Level 5	\$15.60 per week (\$811.00 per year)	\$14.15 per week (\$736.00 per year)
Over \$78,000	Level 6	\$19.78 per week (\$1029.00 per year)	\$18.35 per week (\$954.00 per year)

More information is available on the Alliance website <www.alliance.org.au>, or call the Alliance Membership Centre on 1300 65 65 13.

All membership fees are tax-deductible.