

AMWU officials challenge plan to make them redundant

Thursday, July 16, 2015, 11:20am

The AMWU has responded to the continued loss of Australian manufacturing jobs and falling union membership by making 11 officials redundant in Victoria and NSW over recent months.

The job cuts have become public after two Victorian officials, Mark Solly and Greg Warren, launched a [Federal Court challenge](#) in May to halt plans to retrench them.

That challenge is yet to heard, but the job cuts underline the hard questions facing the AWMU, which has long been a powerful influence within the broader union movement and on the left of the ALP.

The AWMU's influence has been particularly strong in industry policy but it faces a battle to stem its membership losses and rebuild its coverage, to maintain its clout in union and ALP forums. The union had 144,176 members in January 2003 but its membership had shrunk to 90,103 by September 2014, a fall of almost 38%.

It faces the loss of thousands more members when local car production stops at the end of 2017.

This includes direct job losses at the doomed car makers — Ford, GM Holden and Toyota — as well as the component supply chain that employs about 33,000 workers.

The AWMU's national secretary, Paul Bastian, said yesterday in a statement provided to *Workplace Express* that the union had been forced to "cut its cloth to suit the changing circumstances".

"It's no secret that Australia's manufacturing sector has been under real pressure in recent years," Bastian said. "The high Australian dollar in the years following the GFC — coupled with the withdrawal of support for manufacturing by the current government — has resulted in the loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs."

"Manufacturing employment has fallen from over one million to around 850,000 in that time, and continues to fall."

"This situation should be of great shame to state and federal governments — governments that have in recent years failed to support the industries and jobs that have built Australia's middle class since the post war period.

"The imminent closure of the auto industry, the decline of naval shipbuilding and the lack of support to local rail manufacturing — these industries and thousands of jobs are blood on the hands of governments state and federal. Governments must step up to the plate and support Australian jobs and industry.

"As a result, the AMWU has to cut its cloth to suit the changing circumstances and this has led to some internal redundancies." "We will continue to organise new and existing members in defence of their workplace rights and conditions, to work with smart employers to improve productivity through skills and job re-design, and to stand with the ACTU and the broader community to hold this most ideological of Federal Governments to account."

In Victoria, two AMWU officials are understood to have accepted voluntary redundancy, but two others, Solly and Warren, are contesting whether they can be made redundant. Solly and Warren were re-elected as officials in national AWMU elections in March, but were told in May they were being made redundant.

Their application to the Federal Court names the AWMU's Victorian secretary, Steve Dargavel, and the AWMU as respondents.

They are seeking orders under the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act that Dargavel withdraw letters issued to them in May and reinstate them.

They argue the union has to observe its [Rule 13](#), which says that officials can only be removed in cases of misbehaviour and neglect of duty, after a vote passed by a two thirds majority in internal union forums such as national and state conferences, or by the divisional council.

The AMWU has confirmed that its NSW branch has had seven redundancies but has declined to comment on whether more are in the pipeline for later this year.

The union also faces the possible loss of members as big gas projects in Queensland and WA are completed.

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