

Activists try new tactics

by Cameron Broadhurst

Highly organised and branded political campaigns such as the recent "supersize my pay" and "shelf-respect" represent new tactics for activism in New Zealand, claim organisers.

They say the campaigns by Unite and the National Distribution Union more closely follow the "organisational model", which aims to bring community activism into social movements.

The alternative "partnership model" is characterised by negotiation between union leaders and company bosses.

Simon Oosterman, a National Distribution Union (NDU) organiser, says both models have always existed within different unions, but the latest campaigns marked a return to the organisational model, which faded with the post-1990 weakening of unions.

"The organising model is struggle-based, between those who have and those who don't."

Oosterman says the "supersize my pay" campaign for equal youth rates pushed unions and made them realise there were things they could do that they weren't doing.

He added heavily branded campaigns come from a consumer culture where corporate brands were more identifiable than they used to be.

But while mass-media offered opportunities to publicise campaigns, he says it is questionable whether it could strengthen workers' movements.

"The whole brand thing is a good strategy, but at the end of the day it comes down to econom-



PHOTO: MERLE FOSTER

MAKING A STAND: Young workers march down Queen St for the "supersize my pay" campaign.

ic impact."

He says youth workers in the fast-food industry do not have the economic strength and union history able to sustain the later NDU actions against Progressive supermarkets.

Omar Hamed, a member of Auckland University's Students

for Palestine group and involved in youth rates activism, says recent campaigns may have shocked some among the public and older union members.

But he says partnership models "just maintain the status quo". Progressive's recent lock-out of striking workers demon-

strated campaigns that rely on image over substance could be vulnerable.

Hamed says New Zealand campaigns tend to follow political and social movements from overseas, particularly the United States.

Following the anti-globalisa-

tion and anti-war movements, he says the next front for global activists and their New Zealand counterparts could be climate change.

"Get up, stand up" activism special — pages 12-13.

Wattie's slams baby food attack

by Karen Tay

Heinz Wattie's NZ Ltd denies claims made by an organic food company that its baby food is unhealthy for infants and young toddlers.

"Wattie's does not add salt to any of its baby food in cans or jars," said Paul Hemsley, spokesperson for Heinz Wattie's New Zealand.

The company was responding to a claim by organic company Green Monkey that Wattie's baby food contained too many preservatives.

A jar of Wattie's banana custard has only 1.5 per cent banana in it, according to Charlotte Rebbeck, director of Green Monkey.

Hemsley says Wattie's does make baby custard that is served with fruit, but only a small amount of banana is needed in the recipe to add flavour.

A larger amount would turn the product brown, he says.

"The level of sugar in Wattie's baby custards is between 5-6.8 per cent. This is very low. Our national food composition database shows that homemade egg custard contains 10 per cent sugar," says Hemsley.

Dr John Birkbeck, lecturer in nutrition at Massey University,

says there is no evidence to suggest commercially-prepared baby food is less healthy than organic baby food.

"I'm pretty sceptical of most of the claims made by organic baby food companies," he says.

Wattie's has a "reasonable" range of products, which are perfectly safe alternatives for parents to feed their tots. The only difference between Wattie's baby food and "so-called" organic baby food is in the price, says Birkbeck.

Rebbeck disagreed with Birkbeck's comments. The difference between organic and commercial baby food can be told by a simple taste test, she says.

"Babies' stomachs are so much more susceptible than adult systems. What we can tolerate is too harsh for an immature system."

She dismissed Wattie's claim that its custard would turn brown if too much banana was added, saying that was just an excuse.

"You can add lemon juice to stop bananas turning brown. If they can fly a man to the moon, they can figure out a way to stop custard going brown."

Rebbeck says she was not trying to attack Wattie's — but giving parents a choice on what to feed their children. Wattie's and Green Monkey targeted different

niche markets anyway, she added.

In response to claims of too many preservatives in their baby food, Hemsley says many people misunderstand the labelling.



"The sodium is listed on food labels as added salt is only that which is naturally present in ingredients such as most vegetables, some fruits and cheese."

Birkbeck has another alternative for parents trying to get healthier food for their tots — they could try making it themselves at home.

Both commercial and organic baby food is like any other food, it depends on how you use it.

Parents concerned about obesity or other health problems could simply control their children's diet, he says.

Science isn't the answer to everything, says Rebbeck.

AUT cafés profit-driven

by Scott Winton

AUT University students are losing out to those at Auckland University when it comes to campus café prices.

A latté at AUT will set you back \$3.50 compared with \$2.60 at one of the Auckland University student association-run cafés.

AUT business student Wyatt Zhang says if the price of a coffee was \$2.60 he would be more inclined to drink there.

Another business student, Matt Loughlin, doesn't mind paying extra for a coffee but says the food is quite expensive.

Auckland Student Movement (AUSM) president Paul Stewart says the AUT student union may look at administering the cafés on campus.

Other student unions in New Zealand run their own cafés and the profit they make is used for student services.

"Running them is always in the back of our minds," he says.

Currently the nine cafés on both Wellesley St and Akoranga campuses are run by AUT and managed by Ian Robertshaw.

They act as separate business units. Robertshaw says when the union ran them they made a loss and they now break even. But only just.

"After we pay AUT rent and the staff we don't make much of a profit. It's expensive real estate around here."

Auckland University student president Dan Bidois says the aim is not to make a lot of money from the cafés but to provide students with a variety of food at a good price.

"Our policy is to have the best priced food on campus and it's working. Our cafés are packed and we even have some AUT students coming across," says Bidois.

The Auckland University Student Association (AUSA) can afford to provide students with reasonably priced food because the university does not charge them rent, he says.

Victoria University does not charge its student association rent for the cafés on campus.

The students association tenders out the contract and receives market rent every year from the premises.

AUSM cannot rely on such revenue streams or cheap food but Robertshaw says his cafés offer great food and he plans to expand the menus.

"We have to provide excellent food, otherwise the students will just head up the road and go to Subway," says Robertshaw.