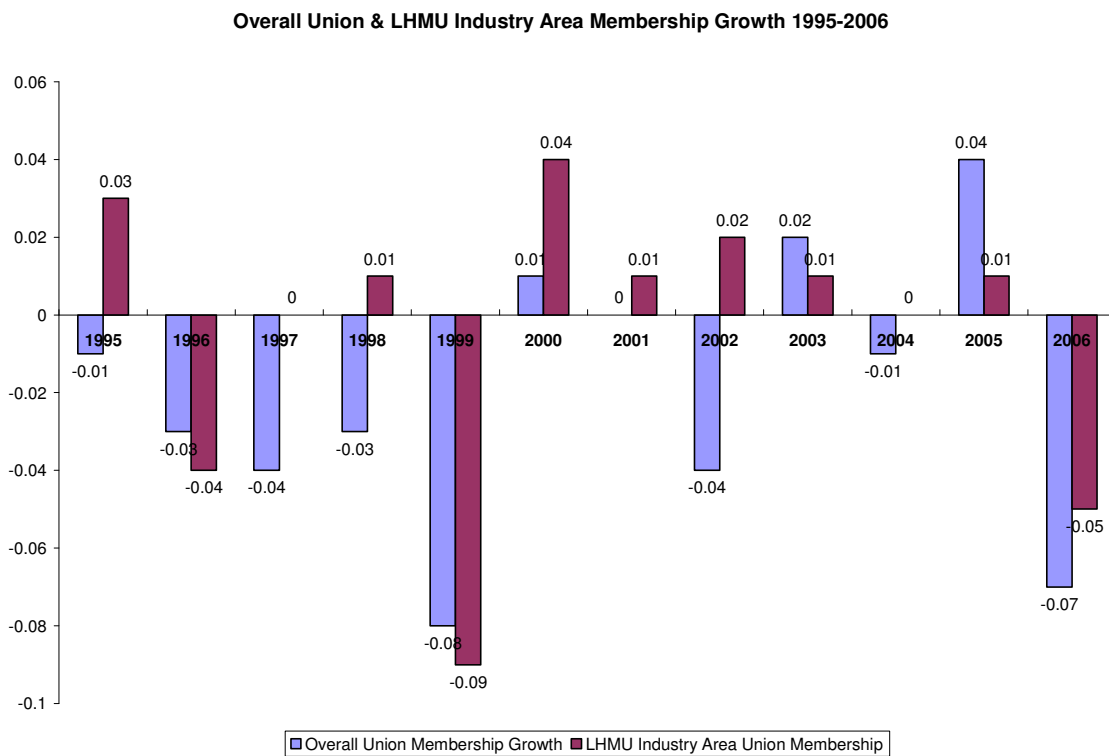


Jeff Lawrence will be a solid and welcome ACTU secretary. We may look back after his time and realize that the problem of the past few decades of the ACTU has been there has been too much advocacy and theory and not enough grass roots union knowledge and leadership.

The appointment of a man like Lawrence takes us back to an era before Bob Hawke in which unions had to literally grind away at victories. There were no Labor governments to curry favour with. There were no researchers who could moralise about social justice issues or esoteric membership issues based on un-readable statistics. There were few leaders and unionists that had attended university. The Conciliation and Arbitration Commission was mostly hostile to unions. The measure of success was the strength and resilience of the union and the growth of the membership. The issues are not the same now but the fundamentals are the same.

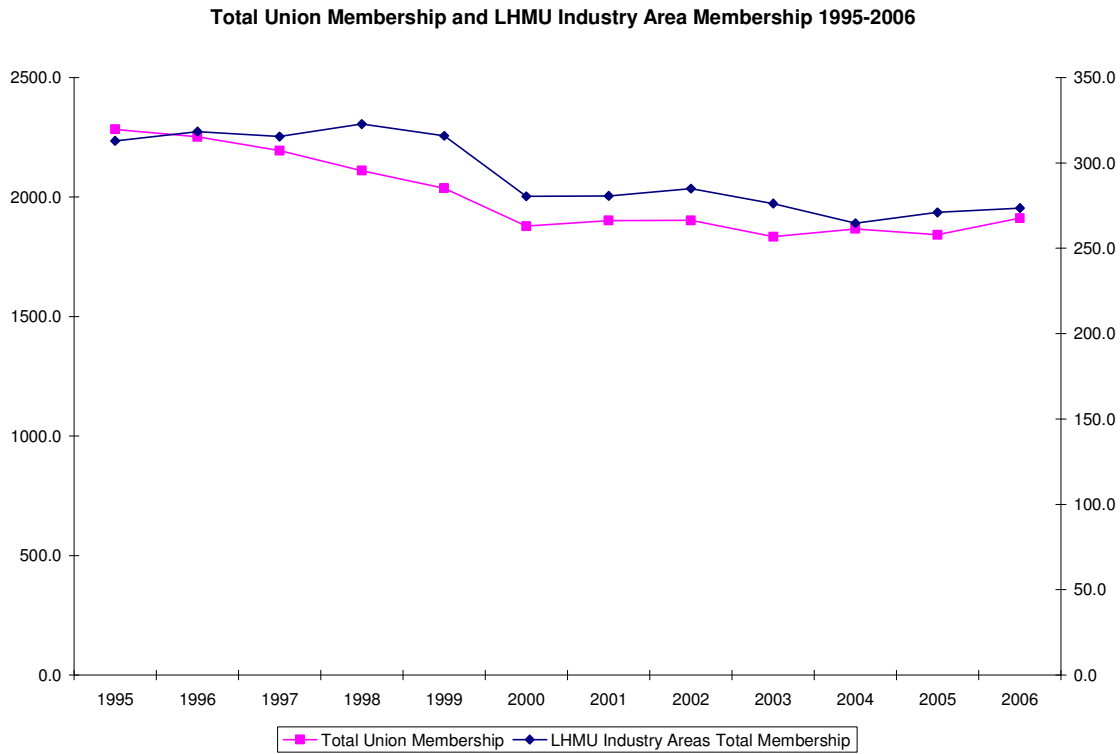
What a relief to know that Jeff Lawrence will not end up in Federal Parliament. He is just not interested in that sort of a role. Lawrence will hang his hat on the successes of the union movement, the success of new ways of organizing and succeeding in a new world of industrial relations and most importantly the growth of union membership.

Paul Keating criticized the LHMU and by implication Jeff Lawrence in his recent Lateline appearance. However the facts do not bear Keating's criticism out. As can be seen from the graph below union membership in LHMU industry areas consistently outgrew overall union membership for the last decade. This was not because conditions in the liquor and miscellaneous workers areas were easy. In fact the LHMU punched way above its weight class in almost every year of the last decade.



It should be said that it is notoriously hard to make meaningful comparisons of union membership. Unions themselves hold on to their own data and dislike sharing it with

anyone. There are also very different conditions and circumstances across the various industries.



The LHMU membership is about 150,000 so it cannot take credit for all of the union membership growth in its main industry areas. But the areas in which the LHMU are working are very representative of the contemporary challenges facing unions. Many of its industry areas involve small firms and workplaces that are increasingly negotiating different agreements outside of any main norm. In many areas such as the liquor and hospitality areas, the union must also deal with a casualised workforce.

Jeff Lawrence has been locking his horns against the very difficult issues that contemporary unions face in a wide variety of industry areas for the last seventeen years. The ACTU will only gain from his experiences. Above all Lawrence is an honourable, honest, straight talking man without personal political ambitions who deserves our respect, some luck and the chance to get into the job.