

## CASE STUDY THREE: THE UNION SECTOR

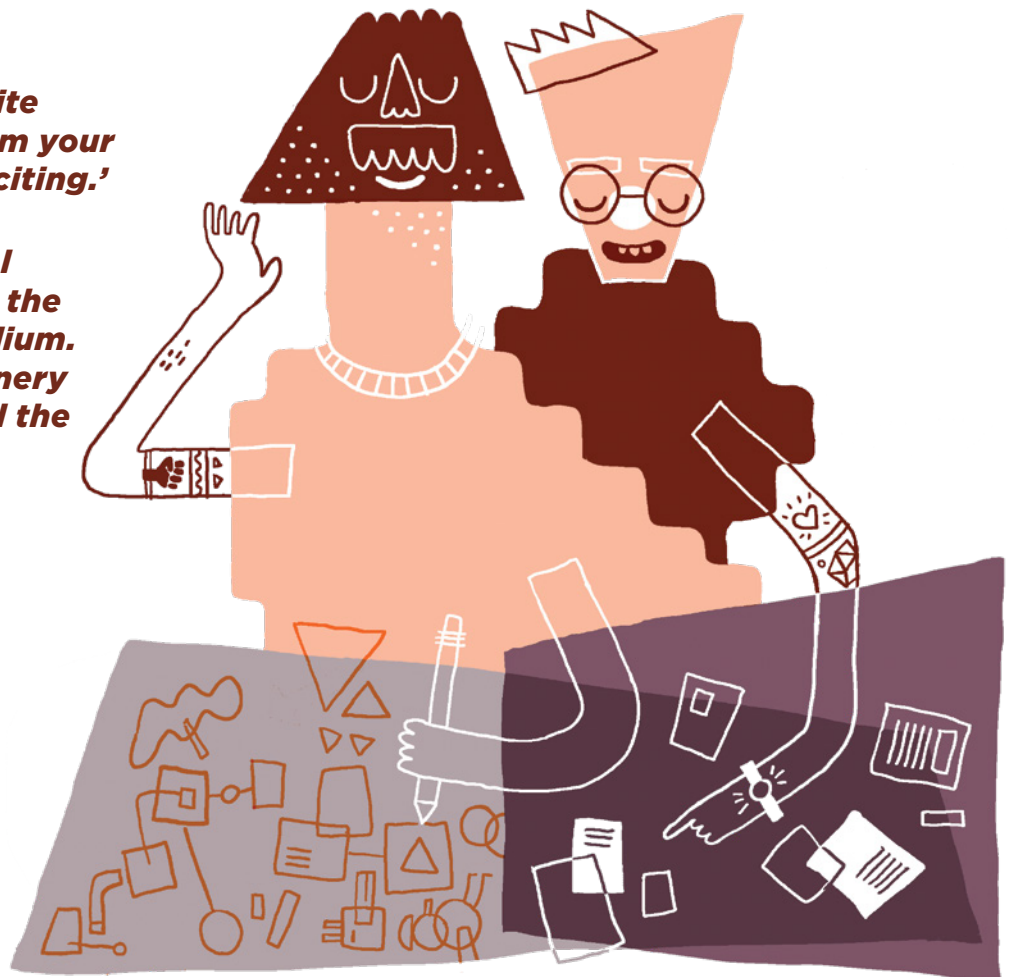
### In which a graphic journalist brings specialist knowledge, research skills and creative intuition to help a union activate its membership.

**Sam** is a graphic storyteller who makes longform comics journalism, often about Australian work practices, human rights, and land use. He was a natural fit for **Amedeo**, a campaign and communications manager for a transport union. Amedeo was looking for fresh ways to tell the history of the union and activate its membership.

Amedeo identified a problem with the typical way the union went about raising awareness and garnering new members. He said, *'We can't just recycle stock images and write news articles because that's what we've been doing for forever and a day.'* Amedeo approached Sam to help him solve this problem.

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Sam is an activist and union campaigner in his own right, with specialist knowledge of union values, as well as a deep understanding of union graphics. This is a great example of how partnerships between graphic storytellers and their employers happen – although Sam is quick to point out that he doesn't really have 'employers'. Amedeo is a client who gives him repeated work, and Sam lacks employment stability in general.

While Sam has challenges finding stable work, Amedeo faces his own challenges hiring graphic storytellers, since his job is to represent a membership and not all members understand why comics creation is a justified expense. One process in particular requires translation to this member base. Sam makes thumbnails (rough comics) before producing final work to check that clients are happy with tone, pace, and details. To a membership unfamiliar with comics, this can look like rushed, unsuitable work, even though it's a regular part of the process between illustrators and clients. Helping his clients understand that the draft is a living document and that their insights and feedback can help shape the sequence of images ends up being a big part of the job.

When a client decides to hire Sam, his specialist knowledge is powerful. He makes sure it's current and relevant through taking part in a collaborative research process with his clients. Even though he is a freelancer or a gig worker, Sam feels a great sense of agency over the work he is doing. He said: *'It was the very opposite of being alienated from your labour. It was very exciting.'*

Like many industries, unions find it hard to tell their complex histories in ways that inspire new memberships to action. Sometimes graphic storytelling is about making complex ideas simple, but Sam and Amedeo wanted to find a way to tell a story clearly and accurately that would also challenge readers and make them engage and think. As Sam puts it, *'this is kind of the cool thing about cartoons: the activeness of the medium. There's a lot of machinery that's invisible behind the googly eyes.'*

Sam can dig deep into a story to identify the spirit of an issue and use that to deliver a message. Sam and Amedeo decided to tell the story of a time when a persecuted union fought back, in order to inspire and activate new members. They used narrative techniques and an intuitive visual synthesis to tell a powerful historical story. In doing so, Sam and Amedeo helped all the stakeholders, even the people running the union, understand what they were doing and why they were doing it in a new light. It's hard work, but it's energising and it's effective.

