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Finance

**REPORT New tactic Unions embrace activism at AGMs**

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CORPORATE Australia has been warned to be wary of shareholder activism by trade unions frustrated at having had their influence in the workplace diminished by the Howard Government.

A new report has highlighted the growing trend of unions using their position as shareholders in companies to pursue industrial relations issues traditionally debated in other forums.

According to the report, unions are increasingly using various tactics such as putting forward resolutions and posing questions at annual general meetings, or lobbying for proxy votes.

Some unions have also called on company boards to hold extraordinary general meetings in order to raise serious issues concerning their members, according to the report from **Melbourne University's** centre for corporate law and securities regulation.

Unions have tried to gain the support of other shareholders by focusing not only on employee interests but on traditional corporate governance issues such as the independence of directors or perceived excessive executive remuneration.

But the actions, primarily pursued by larger unions, have had little success.

The report's authors said they could find no evidence of any union-sponsored resolutions being passed by shareholders in Australia.

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