

To Deliver Us Our Future

Developing Strategy for Difficult Times

NSW Teachers Federation
1999 Eric Pearson Report
by Gary Zadkovich

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Introduction

The NSW Teachers Federation has been described as the most powerful white-collar union in Australia by a number of commentators over the years. It is much more than that. Membership of the Teachers Federation is about the kind of teacher one wants to be. It's about the kind of society we aspire to. It's about caring for children, adolescents and adults. And it's about professional respect and dignity.

We are not a trade union in its narrower identity. Our charter is far-reaching... through education, our members work with commitment for their students, in the hope that each individual will learn and grow to become a caring, honourable person who is able to fulfil her/his potential in life. Teachers do this in the belief that what they do really makes a difference. The nature of our work is not widely shared across society. Our aspirations go far beyond getting the job done before knock-off time, and this is written without any intention of diminishing the value of other occupations. It is just the way it is.

It is this that separates us; that makes us so difficult for today's politicians, employers, and media editors and commentators to understand. In their failure to comprehend this idealism, they resort to shabby thinking, cliches, stereotyping and denigration. With much money at their disposal to do so, they manipulate public debate and opinion against us.

We don't fit what they would want us to be. Unlike them, lecturing and hectoring from their self-defined 'real world', we reject many of the prevailing political and economic orthodoxies. On the humanitarian scale, the developed world is getting meaner, society is getting uglier, inequalities are widening and injustices multiplying. And while the power elites usually don't care about these awful trends, we do. We work in classrooms around this state, like our colleagues around the world, engaged in our spirited endeavour to mitigate the ravages of the modern world on our youth.

It is this idealism that caused 300 delegates at the Teachers Federation Council meeting on May 13, 2000, to rise to a standing and sustained ovation of Max Taylor's address. Now a Sydney magistrate, after working as a teacher, union leader and barrister, Max urged teachers to join with others in a community movement to build a fairer, more just and humane society for *all* people.

He based much of his speech on his experience in the courts, interacting with the victims of our age — the homeless, the unemployed, the drug-addicted, the alienated. He spoke brilliantly, with deep feeling, of the need to organise against an economic and political order that has created such a mean and indifferent society. He spoke of the need to protect



Idealism: Max Taylor addressing Federation Council on May 13, 2000.

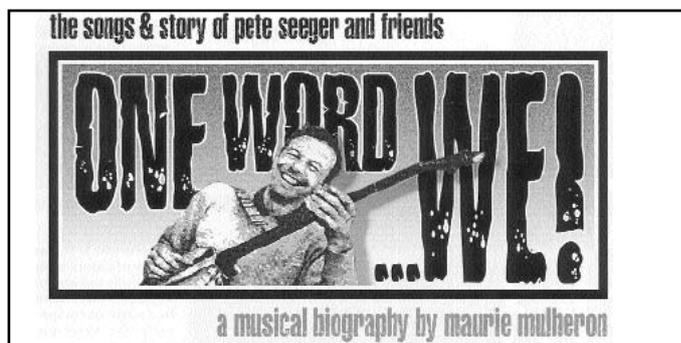
our citizens from the pain of material and spiritual dispossession, and of the need to evaluate the health of our political democracy. He called for

"a massive pressure group to change this dreadfully unegalitarian society we now are...It seems to me as though we've almost reached a point in our society where the political democracy itself begins to crumble in the face of its irrelevance... in the face of these huge corporations which seem to dominate the world these days."

It is our union's propensity and capacity to challenge this calous trend that creates enmity for us.

We make a stand. For the common good.

It is why the Federation sponsored a musical biography of Pete Seeger, the legendary American folk singer. The title says it all: *One Word...We*. It has played to a packed house during repeated seasons over recent years at Sydney's New Theatre and in Queensland and Victoria, its audience hungry for its messages of peace, courage, solidarity, compassion, tolerance, love and hope. How symbolic that this performance is the work of a



public school teacher, Maurie Mulheron, directed by another, Frank Barnes, and has been watched by hundreds more. And how unsurprising that these teachers are prominent in their commitment to the Teachers Federation.

And why do we do it? Harry Chapin, American singer and songwriter, answered this way:

"It was something Pete Seeger said... 'You know Harry, my involvement in a cause, benefit, march or demonstration... I'm not sure it's made a difference but I can tell you one thing... That involvement with these issues means you're involved with the good people... Who are the people who are your best friends? Who are the people you keep coming back to, who make your life worthwhile? The people with the live hearts, the live eyes, the live heads... People who are committed to something.'

"So, in the final analysis, commitment, irrespective of whether you win or not, is something that truly makes your life more worthwhile."

Of course, we can't survive on commitment and idealism alone. We do fight for our working conditions too, as workers anywhere in the world should be entitled to do. We do strive to be acknowledged. We campaign for better pay and conditions, to enhance

the status of our profession in keeping with the immense value of our work.

And for all this, we get hammered, time and again, by that sick alliance of politicians, media controllers and opinion spinners who reserve some of their most hostile and insulting attacks for public education teachers. How difficult it is to resist the thought that they just don't care about what we do. We know that the overwhelming majority of people the world wide just want a decent life with their loved ones, their fundamental material needs satisfied, with some time and happiness to share along the way. And we know the crucial importance edu-

cation plays in the fulfilment of those aspirations, for all people, not just a privileged few.

With all this in mind, we owe it to ourselves to free the necessary time and energy to consider our major priorities and the nature of our social, economic and political context, and to look within our union for new and better ways of advancing our cause.

Defending and promoting public education should be the most pressing priority for anyone involved in our schools and colleges today. This is the 'umbrella campaign' that should overarch everything else we do. We must tailor our work so that other

Priority One: Defending and promoting public education

campaigns and priorities flow from this one big one. It is short-sighted and self-defeating to mount energetic campaigns on, for example, the implementation of the new Higher School Certificate, the educational validity and use of state-wide testing, improved staffing in special education, inadequate school cleaning and maintenance, occupational health and safety, multi-campus facilities and collegiate groups, and so on, without being primarily focussed on the bigger picture. All of these battles become superfluous if we lose the war being waged against public education.

The President of the NSW Teachers Federation featured in a *Sydney Morning Herald* article that outlined the scope of the problems confronting us:

“Increased Government funding for private schools over the years is at the heart of the drift from public to private education... their student numbers are the highest they have been this century. Each child going to a private school attracts both Federal and State Government subsidies. The more children, the more Government money private schools get. So, the union says, private schools are becoming cheaper and cheaper for parents in real terms.

“Together with the widely-held myth that the best in education is what can be bought at a price, the Federation president fears this will draw more people away from public schools. She says every cent given to private schools diminishes public education, with the end result that the public education system will become a ‘residual system’, there only to look after the children of the working class.

“The private funding area is the hardest to tackle, but it’ll be very much on the agenda in the second half of the year,” she said. “Public money is going into schools with swimming pools, rifle ranges, archeries and gymnasiums...

“The lack of trained teachers draws attention to the fact that the Government has not honoured its commitment to public education. If we continue to let that happen, the system will by force of neglect end up second-rate. That’s what’s happening and it’s just not on.”

These comments aptly describe the enormous challenge for the Federation. The degree to which the union has been successful in facing it may be judged through the realisation that these comments are from Jennie George, and were published on May 19, 1986.

A decade and a half later, and the story on staffing and funding is not just the same, but worse. We have a teacher shortage problem, as evidenced in the pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (June 3, 2000), where advertisements for permanent employment list vacancies in computing studies, industrial arts, home economics, mathematics, languages and science at high schools ranging from Fairvale, Ingleburn and Ashcroft in Sydney, to Bourke, Cobar and Crookwell in country NSW. Of course,

casual replacement teachers are almost impossible to find in many parts of NSW, including metropolitan areas of Sydney. In a similar advertisement in the same newspaper, casual teacher vacancies are listed for the districts of Bondi, Granville, Sutherland, Queanbeyan, Moree, Mt Druitt, Bathurst, Batemans Bay and Albury.

In the aftermath of the May 2000 Federal Budget, the following headlines proclaim the situation on school funding:

“Kemp enshrines policies of injustice in education”

“State school exodus accelerates”

“Students flee public schools”

“Reviving belief in State schools”.

The funding of private schooling in Australia is an outrage to all those with a belief in public education as the cornerstone of Australia’s democratic society. Under the management of its Minister for Education, Dr Kemp, the current ultra-conservative Federal Government is privatising schooling, just as it has in so many other aspects of the economy. Adele Horin wrote an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (October 5, 1996) entitled “Schools are being quietly privatised”. This arrogant Federal Government is no longer doing it ‘quietly’. Through its application of the Enrolment Benchmark Adjustment (EBA), more and more money is deducted from funding to the states for each student who leaves public education for private schooling. Horin writes in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (May 20, 2000):

“You may have a child in the most exclusive private school but still appreciate that 70 per cent of Australia’s children are in the public sector and deserve the best education and facilities. These are the schools that must educate all comers, including those expelled from the private system. You don’t have to have kids to see the unfairness of Kemp’s nasty little formula. It represents a total abrogation of his responsibilities.

“But public education has been bleeding ever since Kemp got his hands on the education portfolio. In four years, State schools will lose over \$57 million in Federal funds because of the EBA, despite having gained nearly



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28,000 students Australia-wide. But this isn't all. The EBA aside, Federal funding of private schools will increase by a staggering \$1 billion, more than 40 per cent, in 2003–2004 over current levels. The increase for public schools will be 20 per cent. The magnitude of this change means public schools, which received 35 per cent of Commonwealth school spending four years ago, will get only 29 per cent by 2003–4."

The effect? Gerard Noonan, described it in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (June 1, 2000):

"The drift of students into NSW private schools at the expense of government schools has accelerated sharply, according to the latest figures released by the Department of Education and Training. More than 8,000 new students enrolled in non-government schools in 1999 while government school numbers stagnated last year, dropping marginally by 40 students to 765,332."

It is a bleak picture, particularly when it is considered against the backdrop of contemporary society:

"It's official: the rich are getting stinking rich and the poor are sinking deeper and deeper into the sticky mire of poverty, hunger and hopelessness. In a week where we heard that Australia's wealthiest citizen, Kerry Packer, had increased his fortune by \$34.6 million a week to \$8.2 billion, we also learnt that the ranks of the homeless have expanded to 136,000 people, including 45,000 kids."

The above description by Sue Williams in the *Sun-Herald* (May 28, 2000) follows a report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (November 27, 1998), which stated that at least one in eight Australian children, or 612,000, live in poverty. These figures

appear in a study by University of Canberra academics, Ann Harding and Aggie Szykalska.

As far back as 1987, the same newspaper was reporting the boom increase in the number of Australian millionaires, which had grown then by 3,000 in that year to 31,829. This report was based on a study by Philip Raskall for *Australian Society*. It showed that about 10 per cent of the Australian population controlled about 60 per

cent of the wealth and called for a survey of wealth to be conducted by the Federal Government. Labor Prime Minister Hawke had said in 1983 that "the idea of a government inquiry into wealth was being investigated". It didn't happen. This was the

same Prime Minister who once said in an election speech that "no child will be living in poverty" if he were re-elected. Long after he has retired to enjoy life with his millionaire mates, one in eight Australian children still live in poverty.

We have right-wing think tanks in Australia that blame the victims of our age for their own poverty. The *Sun-Herald* (May 28, 2000) reports on one such group, the Centre for Independent Studies, which lists some of Australia's richest people among its board members. One of its research fellows, Lucy Sullivan, forwarded a report entitled *Behavioural Poverty* to the Federal Government.

"Sullivan says welfare provides enough money for the poor to live decently, yet instead they live squalid, unhealthy and anti-social lives. And despite the big sums spent on welfare, the poor are wasteful, slovenly, drug dependent and gamble their money away, she says.

"The poor are poor because they can't control their behaviour and the state, which provides the welfare cash, should question their moral right to it, she says."

The division between rich and poor is widening not only in Australia, but in nations around the world. In *The Unconscious Civilisation*, John Ralston Saul presents the worsening inequality in the United States:

"The leader of the free world has 1.5 million people in jail: 373 citizens per 100,000. More than double what it was 15 years ago. A rate second only to Russia. Put another way, 5.1 million Americans are in jail or under judicial supervision. Triple the figures of 1980.

"The income of 75 million Americans is lower now than it was in 1996. Eighteen per cent live under the poverty line. The inequality gap shrank continually between 1929 and 1969. Since then it has been continually widening."

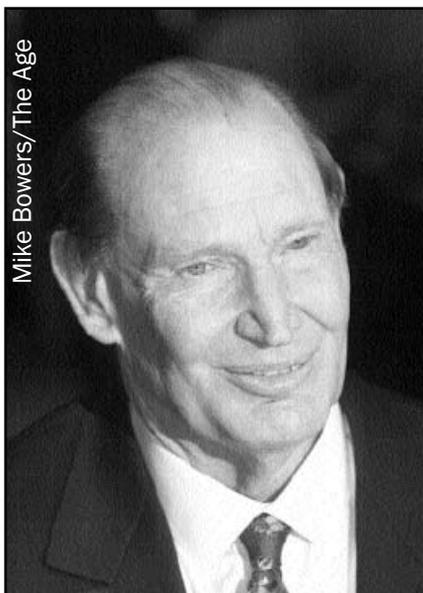
It was this harsh and hurtful reality that prompted the words of the poet Adrian Mitchell to come to mind, on the journey by train across the vast splendour of the American continent:

"the United beautiful States of terrible America."

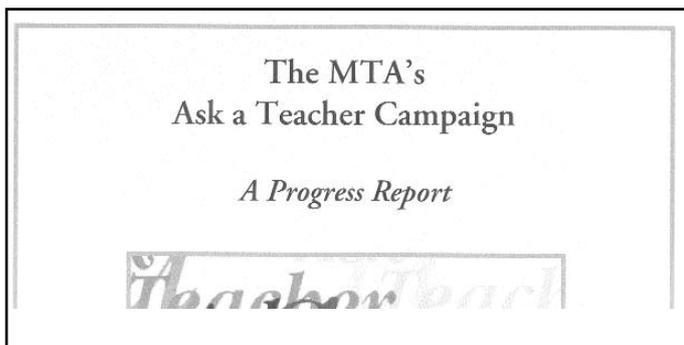
There appears a greater tolerance of inequality in this most powerful nation than in Australia. In education, for example, local property taxes are a major source of public school funding, hence districts with socio-economically disadvantaged citizens have poorer schools with poorer buildings and worse-paid teachers, while the opposite applies in wealthy districts. At least in Australia, governments from both sides of politics have a history of ensuring some state-wide baseline equalities in the public education system, in terms of salaries, staffing and resource allocation. Given Australian politicians' habit of pinching bad ideas from overseas, this is one we all should deeply hope they leave alone.

In a context where divisions have widened and poverty has expanded, the battle for the hearts and minds of parents and care-givers in the public versus private debate must be the centre-piece of all we do. We can mount the full range of Federation campaigns, but the success of these will be like candles in a power blackout unless the generator is repaired and then carefully and thoroughly maintained.

There are some positive signs, however, both overseas and here in NSW. In the United States, the Massachusetts Teachers



Kerry Packer: \$34.6 million a week.



Association mounted a major campaign entitled "Ask A Teacher". In trying to convince the public of the folly of much politically-driven educational change, the union fought back with a direct appeal to the people to "ask a teacher" for the answers to today's questions and problems in education. Media advertising and public events and rallies were used. The need to go to the people, to pump the teachers' view into the public domain, was the driving force for this action:

"Teachers have the answers on how to improve student achievement and enhance teacher quality."

"Ask a Teacher how to make good schools better."

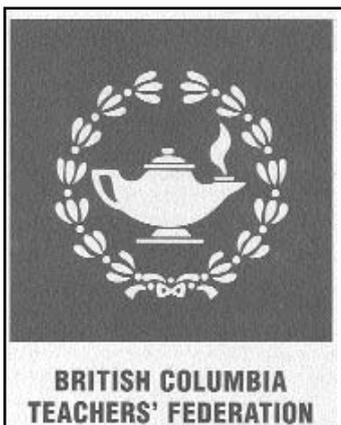
In California and British Columbia, teacher unions have also used extensive advertising and promotional campaigns to get the message across to the public, through radio, television and print media.

In the United States, teacher unions expend considerable funds on direct political lobbying and campaigning. Legislation in many states permits fund-raising from members for this purpose, but it must be by the direct request of the member for money to be allocated to a discrete account.

The attack of the Right reaches right across America, and teacher unions have had to harness their energies to combat it. The Bradley Foundation based in Milwaukee is a powerful force in the American Right. A Rethinking Schools publication, *Selling Out Our Schools* describes it thus:

"Through its president, Michael Joyce, the Bradley Foundation is often considered the ideological leader of the conservative foundations. In 1994 it had assets of \$389 million, and approved roughly \$23 million in grants."

The impact of such conservative foundations on American public schooling is significant, as Barbara Miner explains in an article for the Rethinking Schools quarterly journal (Spring 1994):



"Joyce has taken on school 'choice' as one of his pet projects. Unfailingly critical of public schools, Joyce argues that school 'choice' is the central reform in education today.

"School choice, the reason why it evokes such a shrill response from the defenders of the monopoly, is because it is about real

reform,' Joyce told Rethinking Schools during a wide-ranging two-part interview. 'It is about changing power relationships.' "Asked what might be other important education initiatives, whether curriculum reform or funding equity, Joyce dismissed them by saying: 'All the rest are palliatives. They are incremental at best. They palliate and disguise.' "It is classic Joyce: take a complicated issue that is of legitimate concern to people, present a simple solution that furthers your conservative agenda, wrap it in populist rhetoric, and dismiss your critics as defenders of monopoly, bureaucracy, the 'nanny' state or some similar pejorative."

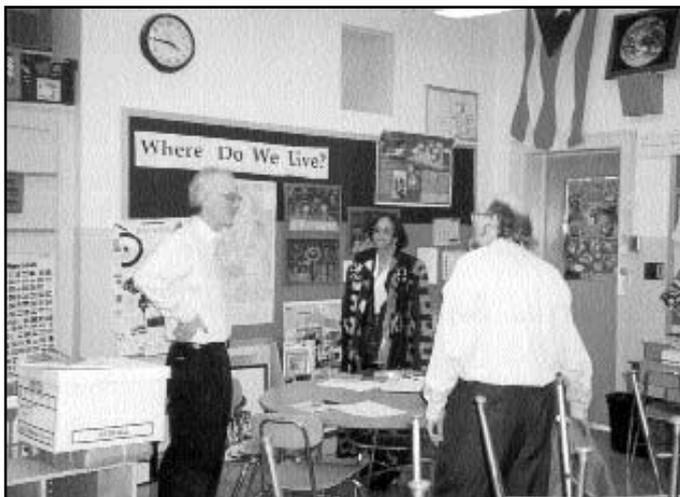
This description could apply to Ministers for education in NSW from Metherell to Aquilina, to Premiers from Greiner to Carr, and to their Federal Government counterparts over the last decade and a half. Both sides of politics in Australia's predominantly two-party system have imported this ideology, in varying shades of the same colour.

Proponents of school 'choice' have been carping about the inadequacies of public education since Thatcher and Reagan. Indeed, the pursuit of this agenda through school vouchers can be traced back even further to the 1950s, when the conservative economist, Milton Friedman, developed the idea. Bob Peterson, writing in *The Progressive* in April 1997, notes their first use in the American south. White people, following the Brown decision in 1954, used vouchers to gain entrance to private academies to avoid attending public schools with African Americans. While the courts back then eventually struck down their use in that way, the seeds had been sown for an on-going assault on free, secular and inclusive public education.

An elementary school teacher at La Escuela Fratney in Milwaukee, Bob Peterson and his union have been battling against the implementation of vouchers since 1990, when Wisconsin began this experiment. Low-income children in Milwaukee can use publicly funded vouchers to attend non-religious private schools inside city boundaries. In 1996-1997, about 1,600 students received approximately \$4,400 each to attend non-religious private schools. The Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) lost more than \$25 million in funding for 1998-99 as a result of the voucher program. Under state law, the program is funded by taking money from the state aid going to MPS. For each voucher student, private schools now receive up to \$4,894, or the amount of per-pupil state aid that would otherwise have gone to MPS. Almost 6,000 students received vouchers in 1998-99.

When the state legislature tried to expand the voucher program to religious schools in 1995, this was challenged in court. Voucher supporters were thwarted by the ruling of Judge Paul Higginbotham which invoked the separation of church and state required by the US Constitution:

"Perhaps the most offensive part (of the voucher plan) is that it compels Wisconsin citizens of varying religious faiths to support schools with their tax dollars that proselytise students and attempt to inculcate them with beliefs contrary to their own. We do not object to the existence of parochial schools or that they attempt to spread their beliefs through their schools. They just cannot do it with state tax dollars."



Battling vouchers: Bob Peterson (left) in his elementary school classroom with Milwaukee Teachers Education Association president Paulette Copeland and Michael Charney.

Contrast that last powerful sentence with the situation in Australia, where private school students are funded by the NSW State Government at 25 per cent of the cost of educating a public school student. (It was 20 per cent until the late eighties when a Liberal/National Coalition government amended the legislation to increase it to 25 per cent, and significantly, this decision was not been reversed by the Labor Government that followed.) Current Federal Government funding policies, as outlined above, exacerbate this trend to 2004, when 71.2 per cent of Federal funding will be spent on the 30 per cent of students in private schooling.

We need a Judge Higginbotham in Australia.

In Australia, the proponents of the school choice agenda bob up from time to time, in complete denial of what public education does for our society. Public schools and colleges are the places where our youth are encouraged to learn and inter-relate, no matter their background. Regardless of class, gender, race, religion, culture and history, people come together in our public education classrooms and playgrounds, sharing their lives, shaping the nature of our tolerant, inclusive, multicultural society, and weaving the fabric of one of the most successful and peaceful democracies in the world.

Jonathan Kozol, author of *Savage Inequalities*, described his views on the contribution of public education to American society in an article for *Classroom Crusades* entitled "The Market Is Not the Answer":

"My own faith leads me to defend the genuinely ethical purposes of public education as a terrific American tradition, and to point to what it's done at its best — not simply for the very rich, but for the average American citizen. We need to place the voucher advocates, the enemies of public schools, where they belong: in the position of those who are subverting something decent in America."

With his provocative education radicalism, Mark Latham is an example of Australian school choice advocacy. A Federal Member of Parliament, Latham carps on about his view of what's wrong with public education in NSW, and offers the same old right-wing solutions in the *Daily Telegraph* (May 26,

2000). This politician gained a fine primary school education in the heart of a socio-economically disadvantaged community in Sydney's western suburbs, at Ashcroft Public School. Obviously seeking to make a name for himself in education politics, he offered the following proposal for destroying the government-guaranteed, state-wide regulatory framework that protects the kind of disadvantaged school he attended:

"The reform of public education requires the introduction of community schools... Under this system, the power to run schools is transferred directly to local communities. While the State Government would still provide funding, the Education Department would no longer be in charge..."

"Those unable to exercise choice in the current system due to barriers created by fees, religion or competitive selection, would be able to choose between state schools and community schools. Parents dissatisfied by the performance of their local school could take matters into their own hands and seek a separate charter as a community school. This model would also improve the industrial relations environment. Teachers would be employed directly by their schools, with negotiations conducted through workplace agreements. High-performing teachers would receive a higher rate of pay. "Classroom teachers would also be more active in school decision-making. Instead of being done over by the ideological purity and recklessness of their union leadership, they would be closely involved in the management of schools and their own professional development."

Note how he chooses not to tackle the barriers created by fees, religion and competitive selection. Experimentation with the schools on the disadvantaged side of the barriers is much easier, particularly when you can slip in a bit of union-bashing along the way. And this from a politician whose party is Labor.

The above proposals make one wonder whether Latham would propose that patients take matters into their own hands and seek governance of their local public hospital? What about the same with public transport? The police service? Doctors, bus drivers, police officers... they could be directly employed by their patients, passengers and communities. The departments of health, transport and police would no longer be in charge. The high performing could be paid more. Invent some tests based on patient recovery, bus timetables or arrest rates, to measure them by! Patients and passengers and those subject to local police patrols could be more active in their decision-making, instead of being 'done over' by those nasty trade union leaders! ... No, it just happens to be the domain of the professional teacher and the process of teaching and learning that people like Latham presume to trample all over. Four or more years of university education, and 10 or 20 or 30 years of professional experience somehow count for nought to the shallow ideologists like him.

The audacity of the supporters of private schooling is difficult to rival. When the conservative NSW Labor Government cut \$17 million from private schools funding in response to the Federal Government's action under the EBA to cut this money from its allocation, the private school lobby quickly mobilised. In the provincial city of Bathurst in NSW, more than 200 people were

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reported to have attended a protest meeting. A similar meeting in Parramatta reportedly attracted even more private school supporters. These numbers reinforce the concern of those intent on galvanising and mobilising the supporters of public education, that the moneyed middle classes and the privileged elite are much more adept at lobbying for their interests than the less vocal and less wealthy majority.

A positive development in 1999 has been the formation of the Public Education Lobby in south-west Sydney. Predominantly working class, with pockets of middle-class and wealthier residents, these suburbs spread from Bankstown and Parramatta south towards Campbelltown and west to the villages of Bringelly and Cobbitty. Supported by the peak teacher, principal and parent organisations, schools have organised into six state electorate groups to more regularly and vocally lobby for improved funding for public education. The plan is to have a teacher, a parent and the principal of each public school and college combine to build a community alliance to pressure state and federal politicians for a better deal. Currently, politicians trade on public apathy and indifference to the politics of education funding. Our system's stakeholders must become much more vocal, assertive and electorally powerful if they are to reverse the current anti-public education trends in government. This must happen, not just in working class areas, but across the socio-economic spectrum in metropolitan Sydney and country NSW.

In May 2000, the Public Education Lobby spread to the electorates of western Sydney, with over 200 people attending a launch at Penrith. (Incidentally, as if to emphasise the earlier point about private school audacity, two private school parents attended this gathering of supporters for public education. One, an active member of the private schools' peak parents council, tried to argue in an interview after the meeting that the fees he paid at Trinity Grammar of more than \$7,000 per annum did not exclude the poor from attending! This level of self-deceit quickly extinguishes the prospect of rational discussion and debate.) This public education movement needs to spread throughout every state and federal electorate in NSW, and beyond that, the nation. Local activists driving this initiative hope that a five to 10 years' effort will build the necessary community alliance to force both sides of politics to wind back policy that presently panders to private school interests at the expense of the 70 per cent majority in public education. It warrants the strongest support of the Federation of School Community Organisations, the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations, the Secondary Principals Council, the Primary Principals Association, the Public Schools Principals Forum and the NSW Teachers Federation.

A related initiative, hatched by the same teacher activists in south-west Sydney, was to have the Federation amend its constitution at the 1999 Annual Conference to create the Public Education Fund. By increasing membership fees by 0.035 per cent, or about 33 cents a week for a full-time member, the Federation has established a fund for the specific purpose of positively promoting and advertising the professional achievements of public school and college teachers, and the public education system. This will provide the Federation with an unprecedented opportunity to mount a sustained promotional and advertising campaign, funded on an annual basis by nearly \$1 million.

It will help create a more conducive context for the pursuit of union objectives, enabling the Federation to counter the negative media depiction of us and our campaigns. It will highlight what's best about our profession and our schools and colleges, and go some way towards building positive morale amongst our membership.

So the Public Education Lobby has begun, in the assembly halls at Liverpool Public School and Leumeah Public School. It is up to the supporters of public education across NSW and Australia to make it grow, to convince the vast number of our own people that we're fighting for the very future of our great public education system, and that we need all hands on deck in the struggle ahead.

"Teachers are under fire. According to the NSW Teachers Federation, morale is falling, stress-related illnesses are rising, English and history teachers can't get jobs but there aren't enough science and maths teachers to go around..."

"Teachers feel increasingly isolated and under attack, parents are now much more likely to criticise teachers, pupils treat their teachers more and more as surrogate parents, or take out their frustration on them, and there is more violence in the classroom."

"Many teachers blame the media for their image problems. The media mostly blame the teachers. Certainly the Federation gets caned in the editorials, especially during a strike. 'The fear of turbulent, strike-happy teachers is a major factor in turning parents to private schools,' said the *Sydney Morning Herald* last February."

The above statements are not from a newspaper story this year, or even last year. They appeared in the *Good Weekend* magazine published by the *Sydney Morning Herald* on October 13, 1984. As with earlier quoted newspaper reports, little has changed since then. This is why the Federation should engage in a process of reflection, analysis and debate, to determine a new way forward.

"The fact is that there's a conspiracy in this country to denigrate and demean the teacher's role and, sadly, the media are part of it. It's not a conspiracy of evil intent and careful organisation; it operates on the basis of the easy target. Who mentions the low wages? We snipe at the long holidays...."



Professor Tony Blackshield launching the Public Education Lobby in south-west Sydney.

Priority Two: Raising the status of the teaching profession

Everyday, people sane in every other way actually go into the lion's den and cope. And we have managed as a society to let ourselves be persuaded that they are not a benefit but a cost.

"Well, phooey to that. I've done the ritual media genuflection to economic rationalism. I've written silly pieces carping at the teachers, and in retrospect, I have no idea why. I suppose there was a time in this country when many people believed the cake would go on expanding in size and some of us felt we had to snipe at everything to induce a degree of reality. But we found ourselves cavilling at the cost of everything and not its value. It's easy to identify what costs public money; it's altogether harder to say: 'Yes, it costs, and it's cheap.'

"... we denigrate the people on whom we depend to deliver us our future. Isn't that what teachers do? We think we can demean them, that our politicians can ride roughshod over them, that it's offensive they should have unions and occasionally be silly and even petulant. But we can't avoid the fact that more than any other group in our society, these people will determine what kind of country we have tomorrow."

This commentary by Peter Smark appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on June 9, 1990. Not much has changed in the decade since. Indeed, many teachers will wonder whether Smark, for all his sympathetic concern for teachers, has it right when he says it's not a conspiracy of evil intent or careful organisation. Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*, for example, foregoes even the pretence of objectivity and accuracy in its repeated attacks on teachers and our union. Its portrayal of us is carefully orchestrated and contrived, and if running a front-page photo of the union President in a dunce's cap on a strike day is not evil and malicious, what is?

When schools in the disadvantaged suburbs of Sydney's west publicise the shortage of casual teachers, and the *Telegraph* runs a story that can only have emanated from the Ministry and the Department of Education and Training, denying the teacher shortage, and implying that the principals of identified schools are somehow mis-managing their employment practices, such deceit and intimidation is more of the same.

The power of the media is such that the *Telegraph* is disdainful and arrogant in its denial of natural justice and fairness. Fortunately, the power of our union is such that we remain undaunted and unbowed by such enmity. True, it's unpleasant, spiteful and does impact on morale and esteem, but fortunately, teachers in classrooms all around the state are able to immerse themselves in their work, for their students and the common good.

We're a resilient lot. And it pays off, too. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, operating at a standard somewhat above the gutter of the *Telegraph*, reported in a front



page story on July 8, 1999, that "the Department of Education has caved in to pressure from schools in Sydney's western suburbs, with plans to set up a pool of casual teachers to deal with chronic staff shortages". This was after the Ministry and the Department had denied there was even a problem.

In the midst of a lot of media negativity for teachers, some news stories do acknowledge the need to address the salaries and status of the profession. In a rare show of fairness and objectivity, even the *Telegraph* (April 8, 1999) can manage it. Maralyn Parker, its education columnist, cited extracts from a 300 page Senate Committee report entitled *A Class Act*, arising from an inquiry into the status of teaching:

"The report damns Australian society for seriously undervaluing its teachers. We don't give them the professional status their training and practice deserves, we don't support them enough, their working conditions are stressful and often sub-standard, we expect too much of them (and they deliver) and we don't pay them enough. And on top of all this we continually and spectacularly bash them with gratuitous, ignorant and even falsely based criticism.

"...That Australian teachers are undervalued and underpaid is to our shame. The committee has made several important recommendations. All (not just the ones that come cheaply) need to be addressed without procrastination. The way to start is to pay our teachers a professional salary."

1999 Eric Pearson Report

The *Telegraph's* editor takes a different slant when teachers actually campaign to convince government to implement these recommendations. This Murdoch tabloid newspaper bombarded the Teachers Federation for four days from March 13, 2000 with headlines such as:

“BLOCK VOTE – How teachers’ union has obstructed school reform”

“Federation has lost sight of its purpose”

“Pay and perks of the job”

“Arrogance and echoes of the past”

“Paying for ideals in the class war”

“THREE AMIGOS – Union’s leaders stick to demands”

“Kemp in attack on union ‘treachery’”

“Parents need to know the facts”

“Teachers plot more strikes”

“Union backs rigid system”

“Performance still beyond scrutiny”

“Union ploy tapped into parents’ fears”

“Non-teaching staff head up union that speaks for all teachers”

“Defiance in the face of reform”

The editorial on March 16, 2000 condemned the union for its campaigning tactics in a salaries dispute that had raged for nine months; ignoring the findings of *A Class Act*, a teacher shortage predicted to worsen drastically over the next five years, and its own pre-election promises to avoid long-running conflict over teacher salaries, the State Labor Government refused to recognise the arguments for enhancing the status of teachers. For defying an order from the Industrial Relations Commission to lift bans, the editorial called for the deregistration of the Teachers Federation.

Ms Parker’s arguments for a pay rise were nowhere to be seen in her regular column that week.

When considering the editorial stance of the *Telegraph*, a critique of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* treatment of workers’ campaigns comes to mind. Jack Munday and Paul True wrote a piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald* paper (March 29, 2000), noting that its editorial in 1905 opposed the concept of a ‘weekend’ for workers, and this has been the consistent pattern:

“Looking at the paper’s industrial coverage over the past 150 years one point is clear. No matter what stage of the capitalist economic cycle we’re in – boom, slump and all points in between – it is never the right time for workers to win improvements in wages and conditions.

“In the 1850s, with the winning of the 48-hour week by Sydney and Melbourne building workers, Australia led the world in terms of workers’ rights. Sadly, 150 years later in Howard’s Australia, the corporation is god and workers’ rights are the last thing on the agenda. Instead, a “me, me, me” culture has oozed its way into the national psyche and the mercenary values of the corporate world have now become government-approved national philosophy.”

A vilification campaign by the media is not unique to Australia. On June 7, 1993, the cover story in America’s *Forbes* magazine was headed “Suffer the little children

– How the National Education Association corrupts our public schools”. A photograph of a worm dangling from an apple adorned the cover. Inside, the actual article was headed, “The National Extortion Association?” and the



lead paragraph depicted the National Extortion Association as an unstable monopoly wielding undemocratic control over an education system that is deteriorating in quality as its costs soar.

The damage wrought by corporatism is dealt with in *The Unconscious Civilisation*, where our world is portrayed as being

“tightly held at this moment in the embrace of a dominant ideology: corporatism. The acceptance of corporatism causes us to deny and undermine the legitimacy of the individual as a citizen in a democracy. The result of such a denial is a growing imbalance which leads to our adoration of self-interest and our denial of the public good. Corporatism is an ideology which claims rationality as its central quality. The overall effects on the individual are passivity and conformity in those areas which matter and non-conformism in those which don’t.”

Overcoming that passivity and conformity is the challenge for supporters of public education, particularly as the ideology of corporatism dominates so much government education policy. An appeal to self-interest and the intrusion of corporate and managerial values have characterised most educational changes since the 1980s. John Ralston Saul argues that this influence is inimical to education at its very core. After presenting the depressing statistics of growing inequality and alienation and incarceration, he writes:

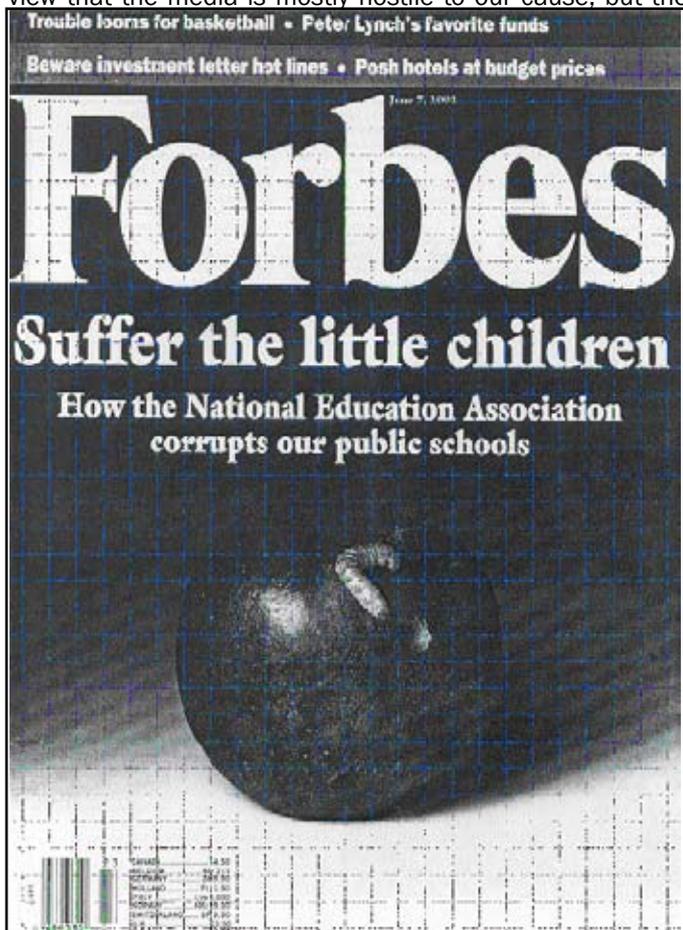
“All of these numbers, and hundreds more of them referring to the same and to other countries, are well known. Yet the effect they have on real policy is negligible. In part this is because our elite is primarily and increasingly managerial. A managerial elite manages. A crisis, unfortunately, requires thought. Thought is not a management function. Because the managerial elites are now so large

and have such a dominant effect on our education system, we are actually teaching most people to manage, not to think. Not only do we not reward thought, we punish it as unprofessional. This primary approach to utility – a very limited form of utility – is creeping now into general pre-university education. The teaching of transient managerial and technological skills is edging out the basics of learning.”

In an article in the *Good Weekend* (June 6, 1998) entitled “Winners and losers – Who gets what in the new economy”, a grim picture is portrayed of work in the 1990s. In this piece, Nikki Barrowclough writes of “the new brutalism at work”. Reference is made to Victoria, where the conservative Kennett Government cut over 8000 teaching positions, closed hundreds of public schools and abolished permanent employment for new teachers into the public school system. While the defeat of Kennett has yielded a state government that may move to undo some of this damage, the fact remains that the teaching profession is under pressure everywhere. The workload demands and expectations are escalating, and questions of salary and status remain largely unaddressed. As Barrowclough notes:

“Despite the enormous demands on teachers, (let alone their important role in influencing the future working lives of Australian youth), they have had to fight hard for pay rises that are still way below those of other professionals.”

The positive and supportive comments of journalists like Smark and Barrowclough appear as rare diamond chips in the mud that is flung. They fleetingly contradict the teacher view that the media is mostly hostile to our cause, but the



point to emphasise is that it is the mass media, above any other form of communication, that influences what people think of teachers as a group, as a ‘species’. It shapes their perceptions, opinions, attitudes and beliefs. Its reach is overwhelming. Organisations like the NSW Teachers Federation must devise the means to respond to its influence. There is little doubt the status of teaching needs a lift. The catch is that too few people are willing to pay for it. Federation must use the mass media to craft the means of achieving this goal, but this will not be easy. The context is grim, as John Ralston Saul acknowledges:

“But what about that astonishing babble of language which inundates us every day – particularly via technology – everything from radio and television to the latest computer breakthrough? Frankly, if it doesn’t relate in some practical way to the structures of power, then it is just so much babble... If an enormous public effort is made to use this babble for a specific cause, it can, from time to time, have some effect on power. But compare these small and short-lived victories with what happens when the corporatist power structures use those same systems....

“Today’s power uses as its primary justification for doing wrong the knowledge possessed by its experts. They know, therefore, that they must do whatever is necessary. This is how hospitals are closed or public education is squeezed or taxes shifted from those who have to those who have less. Knowledge is more effectively used today to justify wrong being done than to prevent it.”

With our feet firmly on the ground, we may at least achieve a ‘small victory’ in the struggle against the corporatists, to defend and promote public education, and to enhance the status of our profession. As educators, surely we are better placed than most to combat the abuse of knowledge and power being perpetrated on a daily basis against the citizenry. The NSW Teachers Federation is well placed to respond to what the Australian Council of Trade Unions describes in *Unions@Work* as “the challenge for unions in creating a just and fair society”.

We reach into every community in the city and the country, interacting with the youth of our society. We teach justice and fairness in our daily working lives. In addition to this crucial contribution, we need to go beyond the personal interactions of the school and college and positively engage in the ‘babble’ that is the mass media.

In so doing, we may address that phenomenon unearthed in surveys of the public’s perceptions of teachers, namely, the view that says “my child’s teacher is okay, but as a group, they’re a bunch of whingers and bludgers, complaining about their salaries and conditions, when they’ve got all those holidays and a nine-to-three working day”.

At meeting after meeting for years, members of the Federation have called on their union to ‘tell it like it really is’ on their behalf. This is partially based on the educators’ view that people have the capacity to understand the message, if we can only convey it clearly and directly enough. Too rarely has it been done. The most common argument offered by the Federation leadership is cost: “We can’t out-spend the Government in paid media publicity.” True, but the union has

consistently ignored the plea from the membership to make adequate monetary provision for advertising support during salaries and status campaigning.

This should not be interpreted as an attempt by the membership to buy our way out of having to campaign in traditional and more difficult ways. Providing more advertising and promotional support will never replace the effectiveness of tough political and industrial campaigning, but it would be an important adjunct to it.

While it is not designed to steer money into a specific salaries and status campaign, the establishment of the afore-mentioned Public Education Fund is a notable development. In its most optimistic light, this should make some impact on the mass media 'babble' against public education and its teachers. A professionally designed, well co-ordinated publicity campaign that 'drip-feeds' the public with positive messages and images of public education and its teachers, should help create a more fertile context for our campaigning.

Furthermore, it will meet a fundamental need in teachers today, to be acknowledged and affirmed by someone in the public domain. It is clear that the employer and Government are loathe to do it. Opponents of such an approach misunderstand the importance of addressing the psychological needs of our members. Surely our union should act to bolster the morale and esteem of the profession. It is no light thing to do something to have teachers feel good about themselves as teachers. And beyond this, if such an action makes more people beyond our schools and colleges think a little more favourably and appreciatively of us, then that is no small thing either.

It will be a great day for public education when the words of Lynn Nordgren, a teacher with the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, are widely accepted as the basis for raising the status of the teaching profession:

"Teaching is the most complex job in the world. We work with the most complex structures in the world — the human mind and the human heart."

Changing Our Ways

When travelling overseas, one of the best things that can happen to a person is to connect with people in an unexpected yet illuminating way. So it was in Boston, when Dr Elaine Bernard, Executive Director of the Harvard Trade Union Program, extended the warmest hospitality and friendship to this Australian visitor. Elaine referred me to a book by David Weil entitled *Turning the Tide — Strategic Planning*

for *Labor Unions*, that is used in the course she runs for trade unionists from around the world. As the author writes:

"The theme of this book is that unions can respond to external changes creatively and pro-actively. This places much of the responsibility for the future of labor squarely in the hands of present and future labor leaders, and on their ability to shape their policies, programs and approaches to fit the needs of the workers they represent while adapting to the realities posed by the external environment."

Weil's book has been used in this report as a valuable guide. It points the way for unions to be self-critical, reflective and analytical in the quest for greater success and a positive future, for the union as an organisation and its members as workers.

After differentiating between strategy (plans to achieve organisational objectives) and tactics (methods employed to achieve larger strategic aims), Weil provides a detailed account of how unions can engage in deep and far-reaching analysis, and strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation. When contemplating Federation's current situation, it is apparent that we can do much more in this area.

Such a work provokes questions on the degree to which Federation has committed itself to a concerted attempt at strategic planning. It is apparent that too often we dance to another's tune, be it a Department of Education and Training policy announcement or initiative, a Government decree, a 'grassfire' issue in one school or district, a media bomb dropped on us, a Royal Commission of Inquiry, a lie, a cliché, a manufactured crisis or a real one. We have performed relatively well in responding to a never-ending sequence of change, challenge and crisis. Federation's capacity to keep on delivering response-mode campaigns is rarely matched by other unions.

The major problem is our inability to draw back from this hectic pace, to gather our time and wits and thoroughly analyse the environmental forces at work on us, and the degree to which we are achieving policies and practices that meet the needs of our members. We must pause, breathe the air of reflection, analyse, and then pro-actively set *our* agenda for the betterment of public education and its teachers. To do this will require some tough-minded focus on strategic planning.

Weil states that the major components of strategic planning are:

"analysing the external and the internal environment, setting priorities, assessing present resource allocation, evaluating the ability of present union organisa-

Looking within our union

tional structures to achieve new priorities, and analysing the success of chosen strategies at achieving initial objectives.”

While this language may have ‘business’ overtones, it is significant that the author deals with the unique features of a labour union vis a vis a business/private sector firm. In contrast to simply maximising profits for shareholders, he acknowledges the different nature of a labour union – the influence of its internal politics, democratic decision-making and culture, and the complexity of reconciling differing membership needs and aspirations.

“This book frames strategic planning within this democratic context; indeed, the political consequences of strategic decision-making will be a frequent focus of analysis and case discussion. Yet it is done so with the fundamental premise that politics must remain a constraint to strategic planning, not an excuse to avoid it.”

An argument can be put that the NSW Teachers Federation has underestimated the need to strategically plan our future. Not deliberately, true, but the result is the same. As an organisation representative of public school and college teachers, we are ‘doing it tough’. Public education is losing enrolment share alarmingly, teachers do not have the status and standing in the community we deserve, governments from both sides of politics are hostile to our cause and starve public education of its due share of resources, the public is unsympathetic to much of our campaigning, and the media is hostile to us.

The traditional practice of relying on Council and Conference debates to set all the directions for our union has not ameliorated this situation. This democratic approach is obviously laudable in determining union policy and campaigns, but it is inadequate in addressing the organisational needs of the union. We need a new approach. We must commit ourselves to developing strategic planning that can shape our work for the next decade.

The times we’re in

We do not operate in a union-friendly society. Prevailing social attitudes towards organised labour are at best indifferent and most often unsympathetic or hostile. The Federal Government’s attempt to smash the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) in 1998 incited a community backlash which may have appeared encouraging for the labour movement’s cause. On closer analysis, however, it seems that this supportive public attitude was founded more on opposition to the way the Government colluded with the employer to attack the MUA, rather than a widespread support for workers to organise. It was the sight of balaclava-wearing security officers and snarling guard dogs that incited community concern and sympathy, rather than a widely-held view that the union was right and the employer was wrong in the dispute over staffing and conditions on the waterfront.

It is foolish to ignore the sway of public opinion in our work as a union. This is particularly so in public education. Our members as teachers interact with students, parents, care-givers, adults, community support people, welfare pro-

viders, local sporting groups, employers and business representatives, charities, specific program education groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support groups and representatives, politicians, and so on. In every community across the state, public school and college teachers are there. To pursue campaign objectives and tactics as if we operate in a vacuum, as if the impact of our actions does not impinge on these myriad relationships and interactions, is counter-productive, to say the least. Clearly, such considerations are factored into our debates and thinking when tactics are devised, but the pressure is mounting to better balance our actions with the public’s perceptions of the teaching profession and public schools and colleges.

This is not just a statement for commonsense. It is a plea for the NSW Teachers Federation to be much more strategic in its actions. If the ultimate target of our campaigning is government, and the citizens of this state elect that government, then clearly what those citizens think of us and our claims should be a crucial factor in what we do. One recent example will illustrate this point. In the lead-up to the March 1999 state election, the NSW Teacher Federation campaigned for a range of improvements in public education – reduction in infants class sizes, improved staffing for special education, better school cleaning and maintenance, strategies to address the casual teacher shortage, educational change based on sound research and a state-wide policy framework, and enhanced teacher salaries and status.

Salaries and status was but one of the issues the union pursued in this campaign. Its inclusion in the campaign platform, based on considerable opinion within Federation’s forums that salaries is the issue that mobilises most members to take industrial and political action, enabled the politicians and the media to characterise our broad campaign as a front for a salaries campaign. Through media manipulation and spin, politicians were able to position us as the ‘greedy teachers’ seeking a pay increase and not really caring about class sizes, the quality of our school buildings and classrooms, and support for students with special needs. The ground was shifted to where the government and opposition are strongest, where the media is most hostile, and where community support is weakest.

The union was manoeuvred to a position that denied us the opportunity to appeal to the electors of NSW on the range of issues that directly affected their children as students in public education. Yes, of course teacher salaries and status has an impact on the quality and supply of teachers, but this impact is less obvious to parents and care-givers than class sizes or classrooms that have been properly cleaned and buildings that have been properly maintained, or adequate support for students with learning difficulties. (And it can be argued that the uppermost thoughts of teachers when they walk into class each day are not about the money they’re paid for it, but how to reach that group of difficult-to-manage students, how to cater for all the different needs or program on the new curriculum without training and development, how to get that heater fixed or convince the powers that be to air-condition the demountable class-

room for when the temperature soars near 40 degrees.) If we had been identified as only taking strike action on these issues, then we could have claimed most of the high moral ground. We played into the hands of television and radio stations and newspapers that were just itching to denigrate us as 'out-dated militants'. How many voters would really factor a teacher salaries increase into their deliberations when casting their vote?

We have to be much more analytical and judicious in developing a strategy that accommodates our unique position as the providers of public education, in a society that is not sympathetically disposed to unionism and militancy and that is all too susceptible to the power of mass media.

Public sector unionism

Our existence as a public sector union means we are subject to the shifting winds of government policy and ideology. As both sides of politics have converged so disturbingly in recent years on matters economic, the winds have tended to blow from much the same direction with much the same spite. To demonstrate this convergence, look at what Tony Blair, the British Labour Prime Minister has to say:

"The determining context of economic policy is the new global market. That imposes huge limitations of a practical nature — quite apart from reasons of principle — on macroeconomic policies."

Ralston Saul uses the above comments to make the point that "globalisation and the limits it imposes are the most fashionable miniature ideologies of our day".

The damage of such ideologies is beginning to incite a political backlash, as evidenced in what *Time* magazine (December 13, 1999) called the Seattle Battle:

"At the Seattle meeting of the World Trade Organisation, the bureaucrats may not have accomplished all that much last week. The chaos that surrounded them did. In this moment of triumphant capitalism, of planetary cash flows and a priapic Dow, all the second thoughts and outright furies about the global economy collected on the streets of downtown Seattle and crashed through the windows of NikeTown. After two days of uproar scented with tear gas and pepper spray, the world may never again think the same way about free trade and what it costs."

Since the early 1980s in Australia, unions have been on the back-foot, battling against the excesses of globalisation, economic rationalism and political expediency. Unlike successful campaigns for betterments by private sector unions, the costs of which may be passed on to consumers as increased prices, public sector unions must tackle governments that are most often unwilling to allocate the funds necessary to meet the costs of union campaign objectives. Government treasurers' obsessions with balancing the books make for a difficult context for teacher unions to achieve betterments. When government propaganda is all about how many more dollars are being spent on public education in each successive budget (as distinct from what the funding is in real terms), taxpayers are disinclined to put their hands up to increase taxes to pay for improvements to public education. In this context, taxpayers are susceptible to the argument that

the government just doesn't have the money to fund all that teacher unions are after. This scenario leads Weil to write:

"... efforts to increase the size of public budgets require unions not only to enlist the support of political allies (as they have done historically), but to engage and convince members of the public about the merits of their activities. It is the need to work with the public as taxpayers (and not against them) that represents perhaps the greatest challenge for public sector union leaders."

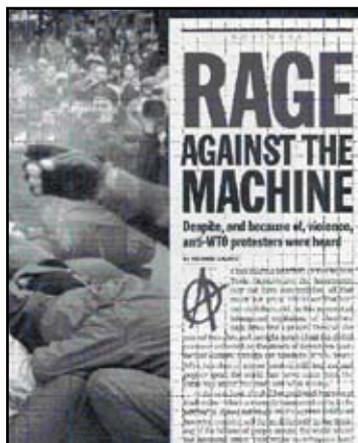
A factor in developing strategy here is whether a public sector union like ours works in isolation from others, pursuing our own campaign objectives (a salaries increase, improvements in working conditions, or opposing or proposing an education policy or change), or whether we seek to form an alliance with other public sector unions in a broader campaign.

The NSW Teachers Federation experience in the 1999–2000 salaries and status campaign provides insight on this point. Under a Labor Government, the state Labor Council leadership consented to a wages strategy that delivered public sector unions to a 'one-size-fits-all' deal, namely, 16 per cent over four to five years, partially funded by 'administrative savings' or cut-backs within the various government departments. Some unions, with relatively conservative membership and leadership, accepted this deal without a fight. The NSW Teachers Federation continued with its campaign for a 7.5 per cent per annum claim, based on a teacher shortage already biting and bound to get worse, and a loss of relativity over 20 years against other professions and average weekly earnings.

Disturbed but undeterred by the compliance of other public sector unions, Federation continued its campaign. Other unions fell in with the 'one-size-fits-all' deal. Federation was grappling with a government whose arrogance appeared proportionate to its overwhelming majority in parliament and whose indifference seemed fuelled by an irrelevant, ineffectual State Opposition. Eventually, the NSW Teachers Federation was dragged into a settlement that was better than those signed by the unions that succumbed without a fight, but was nonetheless merely an enhanced variation on the 16 per cent deal. 'The best of a bad bunch of public sector wages deals' is an apt description. Federation was unable to break through the weight of the forces combined against it — a Labor Government with a commanding majority, a Labor Council

whose secretary is a Deputy President in the Labor Party, moderate unions affiliated to the Labor Party, and a mass media united in its condemnation of the NSW Teachers Federation for its independent pursuit of its salaries and status campaign. Federation was characterised as 'the rogue union'.

This scenario begs the question, did the unions talk to each other in the run-up to these salaries campaigns?



Chaos in Seattle.

Was a common public sector salaries strategy discussed? Should public sector unions 'go it alone' on major campaigns, or should there be a broader alliance to defend public provision of core services in this society? How does a union's affiliation with the Labor Party and/or the Labor Council determine its treatment under a Labor Government? What price is paid for a truly independent, non-affiliated union identity? And what happens when the more extreme conservatives come to power?

In developing a strategic plan for the Federation's future, the comments of Bill Fletcher, the director of education for the American equivalent of the ACTU, the AFL-CIO, are worth heeding. In an interview for *Transforming Teacher Unions*, he said:

"Teacher unions also can play a pivotal role in fighting back against the attack on the public sector. A couple of years ago, I was talking with some teacher union officials about the attack on public education. I argued that they were absolutely right to raise this alarm, but that they needed to do so in the context of the overall attack on the public sector. They looked at me as if I were an alien from *Star Trek*. They stared and said, 'Yeah, but we really have to defend public education'.

"I replied that if the public sector is destroyed, or the concept is so diminished that it's meaningless, then there will be no public education to defend. That's not to say we should ignore the specific importance of defending public education, but rather to emphasise that the attack is occurring in the context of an attack on the very premise of the importance of a public sector."

Assessing what members think and need

In *Turning the Tide*, emphasis is placed on the need to analyse the labour market and to assess membership priorities to underpin the development of long-term union strategy. On this topic, as in others throughout the book, case studies of different unions are provided. Weil uses USA Department of Labor figures on projections for employment change 1990–2005, to make the following observations about teaching:

"Table 5-3 also indicates the growth potential of teaching occupations: 437,000 new jobs for secondary school teachers, 313,000 for elementary school teachers, and 278,000 for teachers' aides and educational assistants. While a relatively high proportion of teachers are organised, this past success in no way ensures growth in teacher union members in the future. Once again, a number of looming issues ... will affect the success of teacher unions in organising new members (as well as retaining existing ones).

"Efforts to reform schools, from school-based management initiatives to creating national achievement standards for teachers, will affect what teachers are expected to do in the classroom (or in the school building). Continued pressure to limit increases in local property taxes – the primary source of finances for most public schools – will not subside as the voting public continues to demand 'more for their tax



Disturbed but undeterred: Federation Councillors show their determination on May 13, 2000.

dollars'. Taken together, these pressures will raise the question of what teachers unions will provide to new teachers in this changed educational environment."

Membership surveys or polls can provide fundamental information on the demographic composition of the membership, as well as yielding specific information about members. This is not new to the Federation, of course. We have conducted many surveys, including one at the end of 1998, seeking information about members' voting in Federal and State elections and participation in Federation's forums and processes. This information is valuable to gather. What is arguable is the degree to which it has been used by the Federation to shape its strategic directions. It seems that whenever we move closer to developing strategy based on such information, we get swamped by the next major campaign – in this case, salaries and status, and when we are able to return to a consideration of it, the time-frame has been cramped in on us. All the goodwill and hard work in the world won't overcome the passage of time. We are always on the run, from one pressing campaign to the next. Too often, what gets lost along the way is the big-picture, long-term strategy.

The Queensland Teachers Union conducted a member needs' survey in 1997. In its Youth Target Project, it then sought to analyse the results to see whether the views and needs of the under 25 years age group differed greatly from those of older members. This kind of analysis will inform the Queensland Teachers Union strategy for servicing and organising these members.

The NSW Teachers Federation can ill-afford to drag its feet in developing ways of involving younger or newer members in the union's affairs. As long ago as 1990, the Bakery, Confectionary and Tobacco Workers International Union (BCTWIU) in North America formed a Youth Involvement Task Force to develop strategy in this area. This arose from a 1988 membership poll that:

"surveyed rank-and-file members from the United States and Canada on a wide range of issues regarding their attitudes concerning the workplace, their union, their political views, and their beliefs about the future of their union. The poll revealed a number of issues of concern to the union's leadership in the areas of the need to develop leaders for the future, to address issues of changing technology, and to focus on a number of issues such as child care and health issues. It also revealed significant disparities between the union's youngest and older members concerning their attitudes towards the BCTWIU."

Other uses of surveys can include ascertaining members'

views on key campaign issues, particularly in relation to policies that have state-wide ramifications, such as salaries awards and staffing agreements. They can also be useful in communicating to members that their views do matter to the organisation, thereby reinforcing the democratic and participatory nature of the union. Of course, this can be undermined if members perceive that little has been done with the information gathered.

It should be possible to facilitate much wider membership input and response in developing union claims and policy on key issues. The summary of our 1998 salaries and status claim, distributed in hard copy to schools and colleges, was not a widely debated document in those workplaces. Some may have been pinned to a notice-board. Some may have been distributed in teachers' trays, but how many formed the subject of a series of school and college Federation meetings, where the detail was discussed, debated, and a response communicated back to the union's centre, or a report on the outcome of the workplace debate communicated at a local Teachers Association meeting? There is need for a qualitative improvement in the flow of information of this kind within the Federation, both from the 'top-down' and the 'bottom-up'.

True, our 1998 claim was the product of a debate by 500 delegates at our Annual Conference, but doing it better than most other unions doesn't necessarily make it good enough. The more the members are involved, the more power to the union.

Developing strategy

The fundamental deficiency with the Federation's current situation and modus operandi is the disjuncture between its policy-making and its organisational ability to deliver on this policy. Our decision-making forums of Council and Annual Conference have generally proven themselves to be effective and productive in facilitating the democratic input of the membership. They may be improved with further refinement at the workplace and district level to maximise membership input, but generally speaking, developing policy is not a problem for the Federation. The shortcoming is our neglect of the organisation responsible for implementing it. Too often in recent years at Annual Conference and Council meetings, a debate results in a policy decision that stands more as an end in itself, rather than as a challenge to be implemented back in the workplaces of those people who voted for it. The closest we get to reviewing and transforming the union's organisation is when the Administrative Officers' structure is debated every three years, in timing with the Officers' electoral cycle.

One understandable excuse is that we've simply been too busy, too flat-out fighting and surviving as a union in the last decade or two. But this excuse must not obstruct us from what needs to be done, for the future health of our Federation.

"Strategy formulation for a labor union consists of balancing an understanding of features of the external environment in which the union operates (the market, technology, the public sector, and the labor market) with features of its internal environment (member attitudes, leadership objectives, and institutional orientation), and the political context of labor

unions. There is no simple formula for combining these complex and often contradictory elements."

The above comments from Weil reinforce discussions held with a range of Federation members in leadership positions, and with their counterparts in other teacher unions. It is difficult to reconcile all these pressures, to distil from them the strategic plan. Indeed, it has been difficult enough for the Federation to even devise a process whereby steps towards it can be taken. Intermittent attempts have been made over the years, with not much to show for it. 1999 Annual Conference endorsed a comprehensive outline for the Federation to address "Teachers and Teacher Unionism in the 21st Century". The headings from this document indicate the focus:

- **"1. The Teachers Federation and 'social justice' unionism**
- **2. Challenges facing the Teachers Federation**
 - teacher supply;
 - asserting the voice of the profession in the development and implementation of the curriculum and organisational change;
 - teacher workload, overload and doing the job properly;
 - increasing the salaries and status of the teaching profession;
 - developing professional and community alliances;
 - technology;
 - devolution of education decision making and deregulation.
- **"3. Challenges facing teacher unionism in its organisation**
 - recruitment and retention;
 - active membership;
 - Federation Representatives;
 - the Associations and the Aboriginal Members Roll;
 - the Associations;
 - Council;
 - technology.
- **"4. Action plan**
 - recruitment, retention and active membership;
 - technology;
 - Social Justice Alliance."

The action plan details what the Federation will do to implement the decision regarding recruitment, retention and active membership. It states that a review of a wide range of programs, structures, roles and functions, will be conducted by the Senior Officers and Vice-Presidents as a committee with powers to co-opt people with specific expertise. It goes on to state that the review will provide the basis for preliminary recommendations for November 1999 Council with final recommendations to February 2000 Council.

As of May 2000, this still had not happened. Why? Because the Federation's time, energy and resources had been consumed by a salaries dispute with the NSW Government, which involved the heaviest schedule of strike action in over a decade and over 70 negotiation meetings with Department and Ministry officials. For years, there has always been a more pressing immediate priority like this to thwart attempts at reforming the Federation. With the 1999 Annual Conference pointing the way, 2000 Annual Conference

1999 Eric Pearson Report

will hopefully make a renewed attempt for 2001 and beyond.

In discussing this circumstance with teacher union leaders, it's apparent that so many wished it were different. Some have tried to bring their organisations to this well to drink. In the Federation's case, the intersection of factors described by Weil has produced some lively debates at Council and Conference, but the union's structures and organisational strategy have remained largely unchanged for decades. There has been an increase in Officer positions, with some changes to role descriptions, but generally, it's been steady as she goes.

Given the monumental change encountered by the Federation over the last decade or so that has been forced by the employer and the government, it is not too surprising that the Federation has kept fairly much to its traditional modes of operation and structures. This is explicable both politically and psychologically – some stability in the maelstrom!

We have experienced the excesses of the Greiner-led Liberal/National Government in the late 1980s, when Terry Metherell was Minister for Education and 2500 teaching positions were cut from the system, when 80,000 teachers, parents and students rallied on August 17, 1988 in the Domain near Parliament House in Sydney, and when a massive attack on schools organisation and policy was undertaken. While the Federation won back those teaching positions and some more, much of the damaging policy remains, such as the creation of specialist high schools to mirror the worst aspects of the hierarchical private school sector. The public school system now has a pecking order, with sought after academically selective schools at the top, through the range of performing arts, sport and technology highs, to the schools for the rest. In many areas across the state, local co-educational, comprehensive public high schools have suffered distorted enrolment patterns, as parents are encouraged by government and Department rhetoric about 'consumer choice' to go elsewhere. Metherell argued that this policy would counter the drift to private schooling by offering more 'choice and diversity'. It has accelerated it.

In the early to mid-1990s, we had that flirtation with a more co-operative model of unionism based on "consultation, negotiation and collaboration". This evolved into a difficult and sometimes bitter relationship with the conservative Carr Labor Government from 1995, when the rhetoric of working together was replaced by a bloody-minded indifference and hostility. With a much-despised Director-General, a muddling Minister and an arrogantly conservative Labor Premier, teachers have needed their union more than ever to withstand the "slings and arrows of outrageous politicians". And how galling it's been to endure this from a political party born in the trade union struggles of the 1890s, an Australian Labor Party now so lacking in basic union principles that teachers either spit their contempt for it at Federation meetings or stare at the walls or windows in search for the ghosts of governments past.

It's not too different overseas, either, this merging of Left and Right into bland parties of corporatism. In the Netherlands, a teacher union leader described it in colour: "If blue is the colour of the employers, and red the traditional

colour of labour, then Dutch politics is all purple." So too the disenchantment of Canadian and American teacher unionists with this 'purple politics'. In the United States in particular, the acceptance of social, economic and political inequality was starkly disconcerting for an Australian visitor. Disappointment with the Democratic Party almost matched Australian teachers' distress over the party of labour becoming Another Liberal Party.

Members of the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI) shared similar disenchantment with the way politics was played out in their country. Teachers interviewed there spoke of their unease with the collaboration between the labour movement, business and government, and lamented the lack of assertive, unequivocal trade unionism. This discontent is evident in a March 1999 publication by the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union of Ireland entitled *A New Agenda For Economic Power Sharing*:

"Since 1987 we have operated a system of economic and industrial relations described as 'social partnership'. This model was based on artificially repressing wages, ostensibly in order to increase profitability and economic competitiveness which would result in increased private investment and job creation. This in turn would allow the Government to 'grow' out of indebtedness. As a pay-off for keeping wage increases low, the Government committed itself to reducing income tax and, just as importantly, to inviting trade unions to help manage economic growth. Therefore, social partnership has an economic and political dimension – going beyond mere wage pacts to include macro-economic and social issues. That is the theory, anyway.

"We will contend that this 'partnership' has been, for the most part, illusory. Indeed, it has actually eroded trade unions' ability to effectively represent their members' interest, creating a more compliant, less effective trade union movement."

This sounds awfully familiar to Australian workers living under the Labor and Liberal/National Governments from Hawke to Howard. This period also coincides with the greatest decline in trade union membership in Australia's history. Workers are clearly voting with their feet on this model of unionism and this kind of corporatised consensus politics, and all the while, the underclass of unemployed, alienated and dispossessed continues to grow.

The difficulty of garnering political support for unionism from the Australian Labor Party is evident in a *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial (June 3, 2000). In a typical anti-union diatribe, Kim Beazley, the Federal Labor Opposition leader, is criticised for even contemplating policy that might favour unionised workers:

"What is he proposing? Further surrenders to militant union demands without compensatory union restraint on the wages front? That would not be sensible, not when the Government can point out daily that only two private-sector employees in 10 are now members of a trade union. This is a time for Labor to loosen, not reinforce, its industrial chains."

Given the difficult socio-political context for the struggle to



August 17, 1988 in the Domain in Sydney. Ray Cavenagh and 80, 000 parents, students and teachers.

defend and promote public education and the status of public school and college teachers, it is clear that the Federation must be at its sharpest and best in preparing itself for the future. Developing strategic planning is a challenge, and even when unions are able to overcome the obstacles and produce 'the plan', there's more to contend with in this tough journey. As Weil summarises:

"Union leaders often ask, 'Why can't I get my programs moving ahead? Why do we stay in the same rut, despite agreement on new directions?' The answer to this question often comes down to one critical issue: despite the creation of new strategies and priorities, the organisational structure of the union remains unchanged. The union still consists of the same people who work under the same set of reporting relationships, receive the same types of incentives, and operate under long-standing norms of what should or should not be done in their jobs and in the union at large. As a result, despite the desire to move ahead on new initiatives, no real change ensues. Glossy strategic plans are shelved while business as usual prevails."

The words, 'despite agreement on new directions', call to mind an article by Jerry B. Harvey entitled "The Abilene Paradox: The Management of Agreement". Harvey explores the challenge of managing agreement in organisations, as distinct from the more frequently considered management of conflict. He introduces readers to the problem through an anecdote.

The writer rested on the verandah of his in-laws' home, on a stinking hot day in a little country town 53 miles from Abilene, Texas. He sat with his wife, father-in-law and mother-in-law, playing dominoes and sipping iced lemonade in the cooling breeze of an electric fan. The father-in-law then suggested they drive to Abilene for a cafeteria dinner.

Before he could voice his response, his wife chimed in with praise for the idea. Mother-in-law agreed it would be fun. So off they went. Four hours later, they arrived back on the verandah.

To break the silence, Harvey commented on how enjoyable the afternoon had been. Silence.

He tells it best from here:

"Finally, my mother-in-law said, with some irritation, 'Well, to tell the truth, I really didn't enjoy it much and would rather have stayed here. I just went along because the three of you were so enthusiastic about going. I wouldn't have gone if you all hadn't pressured me into it.'

"I couldn't believe it. 'What do you mean, you all?' I said. 'Don't put me in the 'you all' group. I was delighted to be doing what we were doing. I didn't want to go. I only went to satisfy the rest of you. You're the culprits.'

"My wife looked shocked. 'Don't call me a culprit. You and Daddy and Mama were the ones who wanted to go. I just went along to be sociable and to keep you happy. I would have had to be crazy to want to go in heat like that.'

"Her father entered the conversation abruptly. 'Hell!' he said.

"He proceeded to expand on what was already absolutely clear. 'Listen, I never wanted to go to Abilene. I just thought you might be bored. You visit so seldom I wanted to be sure you enjoyed it. I would have preferred to play another game of dominoes and eat the leftovers in the icebox.'

"After the outburst of recrimination we all sat back in silence. Here we were, four reasonably sensible people who, of our own volition, had just taken a 106-mile trip across a godforsaken desert in a furnace-like temperature through a cloud-like dust storm to eat unpalatable food at a hole-in-the-wall cafeteria in Abilene, when none of us had really wanted to go. In fact, to be more accurate, we'd done just the opposite of what we wanted to do."

As Harvey describes, the symptoms of this failure to manage agreement in an organisation include failure to communicate what one really thinks, and making collective decisions based on inaccurate or invalid information that lead to counterproductive actions. This in turn creates frustration, anger, irritation and dissatisfaction with the organisation. Subgroups are formed, common views are shared, other groups and authority figures are blamed, and finally, if it is ignored, the cycle repeats itself with more intensity.

Avoiding the trip to Abilene is a challenge for us all.

Money and resources

There is often a tension between “the campaigners” and “the managers” within a union. The latter are pre-occupied with the long-term viability and survival of the organisation, while the former argue that union strength and viability are measured by the success of campaigns for the advancement of members’ working conditions. Of course, these aren’t mutually exclusive, and there is usually a balance of sorts worked out between these tendencies. There are times when the General Secretary or Executive Director of a union may be characterised like the treasurer of the local sporting club, who measures the success of the club on the bank balance, the quality of the clubhouse and the playing surface of the grounds, rather than on match results. To repeat, however, ultimate success is usually built on a balance of these views.

Federation has its own recent example of this tension. Re-locating from our head office in Sussex Street, Sydney to Mary Street, Surry Hills was based on a range of factors, including the burgeoning costs of maintaining an aging building. Federation Council and Conference endorsed a move. An old building near central railway station was purchased, renovated, and the Federation gained a new home. Plans included the purchase of an adjoining block of land and a joint proposal to build an auditorium and new premises for the NSW Teachers Federation Health Society. This all necessarily involved a great deal of time and money.

The re-location from Sussex Street occurred at the end of 1998, two and a half years after the conclusion of the last salaries and status campaign. Clearly the re-location became a major organisational focus for the Federation.

A September 1996 Council decision endorsed the setting-aside of funds for media publicity to support our 1999 salaries and status campaign. This decision, based as it was on the strong and repeated requests of the membership through 1995 and 1996 for effective media publicity to support our salaries campaigning, was not implemented. Even with three years notice and a Council decision binding on the organisation, it didn’t happen. Money was certainly spent on advertising and publicity during the latter campaign, but it was drawn from the usual, limited campaign budget. This example is used to illustrate the manner in which the tension between the campaigners and the managers may be enacted.

The above scenario is neither new nor unique to the Federation. Consideration of it, however, should inform the way forward in developing long-term strategy. Weighing up the bricks and mortar factors against the needs of members in their workplaces is a constant juggle. We’re a long way from Weil’s description of how some unions deal with their finances:

“A union’s finances can also send important signals to the membership. For example, when Ron Carey won election as the new President of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, one of his first acts was to sell assets acquired by Teamster officers in earlier eras, including two Gulfstream jets and a Lincoln Town Car. The sale of these assets brought in \$18,000,000 to the union. More importantly, this

financial action sent an important message to Teamster membership: the new administration was serious about ‘returning the union’ to the rank and file.”

It is obvious that astute financial management is a pre-requisite to ensuring the long-term health and viability of a union. It must be acknowledged that the Federation is in good shape as a result of this emphasis, but that shouldn’t preclude an analysis of whether the balance is right for the future. Weil uses another case study to indicate how the United Mine Workers of America revamped its financial position in the mid-1980s, which enabled it to pursue innovative programs that led to the rejuvenation of the union. In an interview in August 1986, United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) Secretary-Treasurer, John Banovic, explained some of this approach:

“...we saw many ways we could eliminate inefficiencies and actually improve services. One of the things we learned is that in areas like organising, safety enforcement, grievance handling, and political action, it’s not what you spend but how you spend that makes a difference.

“Let me give you an example. For years the only solution offered to the problem of organising the unorganised was to put more people on the payroll. But no one ever thought to ask rank-and-file UMWA to help. So we drastically cut back on the number of organisers and adopted the ‘team-work’ approach to organising, relying on the union’s greatest strength, financial or otherwise — our members.

“... In addition to cutting the payroll by one-third, we imposed a two-and-a-half-year salary freeze on all (national level) employees, including the officers. We cut back on the use of outside consultants and brought in rank-and-file miners who had the dedication and skill to get the job done. We began to closely monitor operating expenses. Simply changing the telephone service at the (national level) offices resulted in tremendous monthly savings. Another example was the 1983 convention in Pittsburgh, where we accom-



plished twice as much in half the time as previous conventions. And it cut the costs in half.”

While the Federation’s current financial situation may not warrant radical surgery and reorientation, some of what the

UMWA did to rejuvenate itself should at least signal that the Federation ought to turn its focus to the financial and organisational aspects of its operation, if future challenges are to be met effectively. How tough will it have to get before we get jolted from the gradual to the radical solutions?

Getting a better fit between the allocation of financial resources and campaign objectives is no easy task. Unions not only have government regulation of their financial affairs, but they also have established systems of accounting that are not widely understood by those making union policy decisions. Line-item accounting practices, for example, show expenditure on salaries, travel, office supplies, and so on, but it is a much taller order to be able to match that expenditure with a campaign objective. Programmatic accounting practices enable union decision-makers to track the money to specific programs, priorities and campaign objectives.

This is a much more demanding approach, as it involves more work by more people in ascertaining the information necessary. For example, how much of a Federation Organiser's time is spent on the salaries and status campaign, as distinct from assisting members with welfare difficulties, advising on working conditions problems, negotiating with employer representatives, and so on? While it would be unwise to take this to extreme lengths, it may be useful to at least cross-reference line-item expenditure on things like staff and Officer salaries, postage and printing, travel expenses, training and development, with major services or programs like recruitment, welfare, or occupational health and safety, or with major campaigns like salaries and status or public education.

This kind of information may help in analysing the orientation of a union's services in relation to its campaigns. For example, how much of the Federation's finances are expended on assisting individual members with welfare problems? How much of an Organiser's time is spent on helping individual members with welfare problems, as distinct from the core task of organising support for the union's campaigns? How much of the Council meeting time (at a cost of approximately \$100,000 per meeting) is spent on administration and elections versus policy debate? The answers to these questions depend on thorough analysis, increased demands on the individuals logging and tracking their time and work, and political will. It is yet another dimension to the development of strategic thinking and planning in the union.

Organising the NSW Teachers Federation

"Adapting historic structures is difficult, since it involves changing expectations of how the union operates, how it rewards different activities carried out by staff and officers, and how personnel advance within the union. A change to structure, in essence, challenges how people work and act in their organisation. Where different groups are represented by strong advocates (such as staff unions), or where particular programs have strong constituencies (for example, big locals [local union branches]), changes in structure can have a distinctly 'political' overtone."

Some of these comments by Weil could apply to the

Federation's attempts at restructuring through the 1990s. It is not easy, given the unique volatility and activism of Federation's peak decision-making forums, but the indicators are there that some things will change. The 1999 Annual Conference decision sets some of the directions. Excerpts from this decision help frame the following commentary and proposals.

"Democratic industrial unions promote and defend the working conditions and social needs of women unionists, ensure active representation of all ethnic and indigenous groups and involve fully those working in precarious employment. In addition, all age groups must be listened to. This may necessitate greater decision making power in the local school and college and greater use of the new technologies to facilitate more immediate communication."

Federation should allocate its resources to maximise the work of field Officers and Federation Representatives in workplaces. We need to be more strategic and bold in delineating the priorities of the union. It is strength in the workplace that determines the strength of the union. We have democratic structures to facilitate the debate and the policy decisions of a state-wide union, but the effects of over a dozen years of campaign fatigue are eroding the capacity of our members to generate workplace activism.

A culture of dependency has evolved through the difficult 1990s. A combination of factors has chipped away at our members' resolve to assert their unionism and interests in the face of incessant, employer-imposed change. The problem is encapsulated aptly when members ask, "What is the Federation going to do about it?" rather than "What can we do about it?" Before someone dismisses this as a dose of nostalgia, consider whether there is currently more or less correlation between what is said at a Federation meeting and what is said at the school or college staff meeting by teachers. There was a time in the early 1980s when the correlation was high, when members would assert their views on professional, educational and industrial issues no matter what forum they were in. Members today are generally more timid and acquiescent than 15 years ago. This is evident in the degree to which the Federation view is put assertively and actively in workplaces nowadays. Too often it's not, although there are some positive signs that teachers in schools with enlightened leadership are doing more of this.

This culture of dependency has developed simultaneously with a growing tendency to "bureaucratisation" within the Federation. There is a range of reasons for this development. The imposition of local selection on schools has produced greater acquiescence amongst teachers. Rocking the boat is not regarded as a top-line mention in one's curriculum vitae in the new school order. The increasing complexity of issues, changes and demands within workplaces has meant that members are turning more often to full-time Officers of the union for help, advice and action.

It's the latter that inhibits activist unionism. When the membership turns to the Officers of the union for the action and the solution, then something fundamental is lost. Just as the 'chalk and talk', teacher-centred approach in the class-

room is generally less empowering of students than the teacher-as-facilitator-and-guide approach, so it is with the union. As Mike Parker and Martha Gruelle explain in *Democracy Is Power*:

“One of the reasons members don’t take control of their unions is that they don’t equate democracy with power...Members are led to see themselves as dependent on their elected officials, and to see democracy only as a question of mechanics....

“The workplace (not the union hall) is the starting point for union democracy, because the purpose of democratic control in the union is to make it more effective against the boss. If members choose and organise their own job actions, they’ll bring that power into union meetings.”

Officers, keen to keep the union flag flying and to work hard to assist members, have stepped in to pursue matters on behalf of members. Out of good intentions and motivations, Officers have been too unquestioning and uncritical in filling the vacuum created in the 1990s by the hostile conditions prevailing within schools and colleges. Organisers, out of respect for the increasing workload of Federation Representatives, Association executives and members, have taken over many roles once performed by these people. While this trend has unfolded, it has more often than not served to intensify the culture of dependency.

As members become more dependent on union Officers and less reliant on their own actions and workplace colleagues to give expression to their unionism, so the union becomes more bureaucratised. The balance of power between the Officer corps in head office and the membership in workplaces shifts from the latter to the former. A more centralised, bureaucratised union culture obstructs attempts to regenerate workplace activism and enthusiasm for union campaigns.

Howard Zinn, the author of *A People’s History of the United States*, was interviewed by Bob Peterson for an article in *Transforming Teacher Unions*. This is his view of the tendency of some labour unions to become bureaucratic and undemocratic:

“Labor unions aren’t the only ones who suffer from this problem; it’s a constant struggle in all organisations to maintain the power of the active rank-and-file. What it means is that members of unions cannot be complacent. Every union has to have a constantly active rank-and-file, defending their rights every day. It’s analogous to society at large, where citizens cannot just simply vote people into office and then relax.”

In some teacher unions visited during the study tour for this report, which included visits to Queensland, Canada, the USA, Ireland and the Netherlands, a tension was sometimes evident between the rank-and-file teachers elected to presidential leadership positions on a short-term basis and the long-serving appointed or elected administrative officers. Real frustration was evident as practising teachers came from the classroom to represent their colleagues in union leadership, only to bump up against the conservatism and pragmatism of administrative officers. The latter were perceived to be too closely aligned with the broader trade union

movement, taking on its more pragmatic characteristics in the face of hostile political and economic conditions. Disenchantment with left-of-centre political parties, frustration at the degree of pragmatism and compromise within the labour movement ranks, and an aging, over-worked and cranky union membership made for considerable discontent when one scratched beneath the surface.

Apart from the energy of the 1999–2000 salaries dispute, which had undoubtedly been heightened by the inflammatory effect of the government/employer salaries and working conditions award proposal, we have lived a period of relative decline in our capacity to make gains. The going is harder, and the 1980s and 1990s have been difficult years for trade unions, but we must be self-critical and objective in analysing our capacity to win improvements in teachers’ working conditions and students’ learning conditions.

A shift to greater emphasis on workplace activism is consistent with the organising model of unionism that characterises much of the debate and discourse within the trade union movement. One misgiving about members of the Federation reading Barbara Pocock and John Wishart’s book, *Organising Our Future*, is that too many of them think this critique applies to other unions ‘out there’, when it urges trade unions to reshape themselves on the organising model. When writing of union experience in the USA, Pocock and Wishart encourage a sense of urgency within their Australian counterparts:

“While there are still many areas of the US movement that could accurately be described as sleepy, there is energetic movement, sustained by a deep sense of crisis, in many places. Activists who might have been considered impolite hotheads are now licensed in many places to have their head and push hard for more organising activity and greater mobilisation amongst existing members. It took until the US movement reached a unionisation rate of half our own (14 per cent) to generate a sense of urgency, activity and impoliteness.

“The lesson for Australia is obvious: the crisis has arrived and a sense of urgency should be the dominant sensation. Our little pillow of union density (28 per cent across the Australian workforce) — fast deflating — provides a vitally important, but narrow, opportunity to take decisive measures to rebuild union density. To date, despite the dramatic decline in union density and the onslaught of labour laws by conservative governments, only some unions are mobilising creatively. There is concern, but relatively little innovation. Servicing the core membership predominates.”

A sense of urgency is also emphasised by John P. Kotter in “Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail”. He lists eight errors that organisations may make in pursuing major change. The first, not establishing a great enough sense of urgency, is explained like this:

“But there is also a risk in playing it too safe: when the urgency rate is not pumped up enough, the transformation process cannot succeed and the long-term future of the organisation is put in jeopardy.

“When is the urgency rate high enough? From what I

have seen, the answer is when about 75 per cent of a company's management is honestly convinced that business-as-usual is totally unacceptable. Anything less can produce very serious problems later on in the process."

These critiques from Kotter, and Pocock and Wishart, are just as applicable to the Federation as to other unions. It's quite myopic for a union like ours to shun the need to revise, review and refine our practices and structures. We might be further down the track than many, but to leave it at that is to deny ourselves some of the most fundamental aspects of teaching practice our members well-understand; self-criticism and self-evaluation.

There is abundant literature on the organising and servicing models of unionism, and this debate is not new. Bill Fletcher, Jnr., and Richard W. Hurd wrote an article for *Which Direction for Labor?* entitled "Political Will, Local Union Transformation, and the Organising Imperative", in which the distinction is made:

"Under this model [servicing], the local [union] chooses to do everything through their staff structure for the individual worker rather than encouraging the worker to engage in work site struggles along with other union members.

"In an attempt to counter the servicing approach, some unions...have moved to alter their representational practices and to place greater emphasis on internal organising. This emphasis on mobilisation is often called the organising model of unionism."

These writers make the point that a concentration on the organising model may yield an increase in the energy levels and mobilisation of the membership, but it does not necessarily translate to expanding union membership in what is

described in the literature as 'external organising'. The challenge for unions pursuing this strategy is to find the balance between internal and external organising. To mobilise existing members and recruit new ones requires comprehensive planning, otherwise a focus on internal organising alone, according to Fletcher and Hurd: "could result in a scenario where the labor movement would continue its decline although it would decline militantly."

For too long Federation has been too easily positioned as negative and oppositionist. We need to streamline our campaigning foci, be tough-minded in what we can pursue and re-shape our directions. More overtly and actively working to empower members in their workplaces is paramount to achieving this aim. Easier said than done, admittedly. The use of new technologies, addressed in the 1998 Eric Pearson study report by John Dixon, obviously has a key role to play in improving the flow of information, and helping members gain more power through knowledge.

"Recruitment must be the business of every active member, especially Federation Representatives, members of Council and Officers of the Federation."

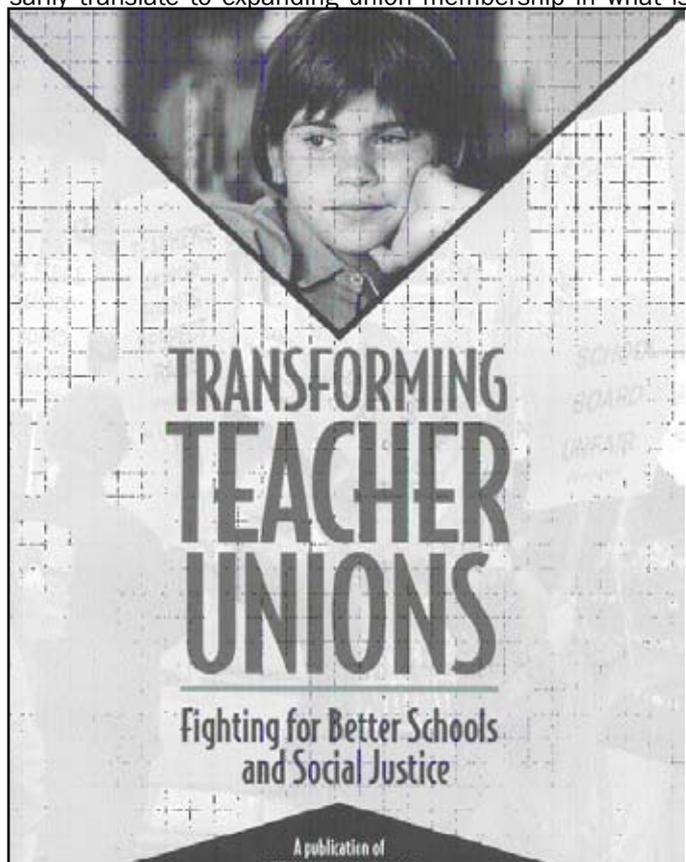
This is not a role the Federation handles persistently and thoroughly enough. Too much is left to chance, or where it does proceed, it founders on the grinding workload that goes with teaching and organising. Yes, it is true that our biggest campaigns are characterised by our most effective recruitment results, but we can do better in this area. For example, the 2000 school year began with Federation Representatives in workplaces not in possession of this year's new membership forms.

Something so simple and fundamental to the union's existence, signing up new members, was not supported by having the paperwork ready for the first workplace Federation meeting of the year, when beginning teachers front up for their first week in their new career. We need to develop a consciousness that means this kind of practice is inexcusable. To put it in perspective, in 110 schools in south-west Sydney, over 250 teachers began their careers this year.

The Queensland Teachers Union has made recruitment an over-riding priority for everyone in the union. They currently have the best membership rates of any Australian Education Union affiliate, with over 94 percent. They list teachers who have not joined the union (using the Department's employment data), and record how many new ones have been signed up, listing them by organiser and area.

The union leadership were prepared to weather any criticisms of 'performance measurement' and 'competition-driven' practices for organisers, arguing simply that this openness ensured that people's minds were focussed on recruitment as the core task. It may be true that the NSW Teachers Federation is more activist in terms of its industrial campaign traditions than the Queensland Teachers Union, but the latter's success in recruitment, without employer deductions from pay, is impressive, and should be emulated.

"Programs and resources will be developed to cater for the



specific needs of young and beginning teachers.”

In western democracies around the world, teacher unions are searching for the means of encouraging the newer generation of teachers to participate more readily and powerfully in union life. No union had the definitive answer, but it was a question everywhere. At the workplace, we can do more to prepare information for beginning teachers. This could be included in the beginning teachers programs that currently operate. Organisers should seek more regular opportunities to speak at Department of Education and Training meetings and seminars for beginning teachers and this should be systematically pursued. Federation Representatives should be trained to more directly address the needs of newer teachers and be encouraged to regard these new members as the future of the Federation.

Beyond the workplace, Federation should fund network-building activities, seminars and conferences, with the specific objective of developing the next generation of Council and Conference activists. For example, in Massachusetts, the teachers' union perceived the problem of under-representation of younger or newer teachers at its Annual Conference, and decided to fund more than 60 such members to attend as observers. As well as involvement in the Annual Conference, this group of newer members also introduced some enthusiasm and fun, under the auspices of a social committee role. The flow-on from this approach was that a number of talented, motivated newer teachers were starting to infiltrate local associations and various forums, making themselves heard and reinvigorating the union.

Federation has pursued a strategic approach to the representation of women in union life. Many women members and activists have been encouraged by the range of women's initiatives and events available through the Federation. So it should be for the new generation.

The idea of building a network of newer activists who could come to Council and Conference, and be developed to replace 'the oldies' as they peel away to greener pastures, has been discussed with a number of newer members, who have been enthusiastic in their response. Federation should look at formalising something like this under the banner of a "Newer Members Program" and commit funding to it.

If we do it sooner rather than later, these newer activists will benefit from the experience of the Councillors and activists we currently have engaged in 2000. Council and Conference are dominated by those hardy souls who fought all the battles of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and that collective wisdom should be passed on before they leave.

With the organising model in mind, the Federation could establish a small team of activist teachers to work in those areas with a higher proportion of beginning teachers, making the links, following up with these new members, liaising and working closely with the local Organisers, and building the networks. The people working on this project would have a great opportunity to develop and be nurtured as future union Officers, leaders and activists. The best way of determining this team might not necessarily be through a normal Council election. Given that these people are new to the union, perhaps some kind of pre-selection process based on specific criteria could be put in place before such candidates pro-

ceed to a Council ballot.

Any suggestion to reduce the number of full-time Officer positions to fund an activist project of this kind will meet with opposition. Whose jobs will go? This notion of 'whose jobs' pre-supposes a relationship with one's Officer position that challenges the political rationale behind Federation's practice of electing all Administrative Officers for a three year term. A view of Officer positions as an opportunity for teachers to work and live out their union commitments in another form, in another role, enables such decisions to be made in the best interests of the overall membership and the union itself.

The contradictory view has an Officer position regarded more narrowly as one's own job, renewed every three years through a Council election, but so long as one is competent, a quasi-permanent position. Some would even regard it as an alternative 'career' to teaching. These conflicting views make for interesting debates every three years when Officer structures are on the agenda. The career path view of unionism is supported by a belief among the Officer corps that too long out of the classroom makes it too difficult to return.

Too often restructuring debates are hindered by Federation's internal politics. Many people have private views about the kind of restructure they'd prefer, but too few are prepared to propose these in an open debate, for fear of the political consequences. The mutually-supporting nature of the political relationships between Officers, Executive members, Presidential Officers and Councillors means there are risks to saying what one really thinks about the structures of the union. (Remember the Abilene Paradox?)

It will be interesting to see whether attempts to shift the Federation to a more organising model founder on the union's internal politics. Consensus is probably achievable on the concept, but try achieving consensus on the means of implementing it! A related problem is the lack of long-term planning that characterises the Federation. Existing forums and processes rarely seek answers to the questions of where we want the Federation to be in five or 10 years. Like the parliamentary political process in this country, too few people in the Federation are able to act on priorities that go past the next Council or Executive meeting, or the next election. This failing has the potential to severely damage the Federation in future years, unless it can be overcome.

There is a current example that will test this observation. The rationale for the creation of a Public Education Fund partly rests on the view that we need to work for a decade or more to build a community-based movement to reverse the current drift from public to private education. The future of the very system we believe in and work for is under attack. It will be revealing to see whether this aim is realised in the midst of Federation's all-consuming tumble from immediate campaign to immediate campaign over that time. This is a major challenge for the union, to break from the cycle of short-term, pressing campaigns to a mode of operation that successfully blends the long-term priorities with the short-term demands on us.

To this end, consideration should be given to an annual residential seminar at the start of the year for Officers and Executive members to debate and plan broader priorities for that year and determine how they will fit in with a five or

seven year program endorsed by an Annual Conference. We should treat Officers and Executive as professionals and fund the equivalent training and development type activities that our members expect in their workplaces.

The quality of debate and discourse in Federation's key forums is inhibited by the failure of the union to facilitate more open forums, seminars and meetings where Officers, Executive members, and Councillors are able to interact in a freer-ranging manner, more akin to a workshop discussion at a conference. Too many corridor and coffee shop conversations determine policy leanings and ideas. To be more professional and politically inclusive, forums should be established to enable discourse and debate that is not inhibited by the two or three minute limits at an Officers' or section meeting. Suggestions like this clearly invite a debate about the role of Administrative Officers, and the degree to which they are functionaries to deliver on policy decisions or whether they are active participants in the debates to determine policy. One thing is clear though — rapid-fire speeches on the floor of Council and Conference are not always the best means of fine-tuning our policies and determining our strategies and tactics!

“Much work is still to be done to ensure the active participation of women in all forums.”

In endeavouring to build on the successes of existing programs and initiatives for women, it may be useful to look at a similar model as described above for beginning teachers. As a part of a decentralisation of the officer corps, the Federation could consider establishing temporary positions for women activists to undertake field work duties such as recruitment, individual support and campaigning. These women members could work on some form of 'secondment' for the union for a designated time, actively pursue the objective of increasing the participation of women in the Federation's forums and promote awareness of women's issues.

The advantage of such an approach would be to maximise the number of people exposed to the opportunity of working for the Federation, and to put people out into the field with an up-to-date knowledge of and insight to the realities of current teaching practices and pressures. Again, as heretical as it is for some to admit, it remains a challenge to stay attuned to what's going on in contemporary classrooms after serving as a full-time Officer for six years or more. One of our strengths as Officers is to be able to authentically speak and act with the mindset of a teacher. That becomes increasingly more difficult the longer Officers are in full-time union employment. As with the issues confronting newer teachers, so too would women members benefit from interaction with other women working in this temporary role for the union, someone who is recently of the classroom and who will soon be returning to it.

The Anna Stewart Program, which aims to promote the participation of women in the Federation, needs investigation to examine whether it can be more strategically targeted at women with the potential for Federation Executive, Officer and leadership positions. It seems that the current program is successful in involving significant numbers of women in

Federation activities, but consideration could be given to realigning it to more specifically support women who show the potential for Federation office and leadership.

“The quality of school and college activism is greater where the Federation Representative is active and the Federation is accepted as having a crucial role to play.”

One of the best ways of encouraging activism in Federation Representatives is to give them the time to learn and act on union policies and campaigns. It would be more consistent with the organising model if the Federation restructured its decision-making forums to provide four all-day special Association meetings or regional assemblies during the year. The cost of releasing Federation Representatives from their workplaces, including the cost of casual relief, would be high, but this could be offset by halving the number of State Council meetings and moving to a biennial Conference. (The Queensland Teachers Union has its major policy conference every two years.)

A possible configuration would be to have one regional assembly and one State Council in each of the four school terms, with the former feeding policy motions and information into the latter. These could be run with a training component, a campaigns component, and an issues and policy forum leading into a formal Teachers Association meeting at 4pm that day. These days would provide an additional layer of support and interaction for Federation Representatives. Our 300 Federation Councillors could play a key leadership and organising role. This would bring union debate and ownership back to the workplace representatives, and providing the time to do it would be so valuable in lifting the credibility, importance and relevance of it. The intention would be to have Fed Reps become more like workplace delegates, holding meetings before they attend such a day, participating and debating when they're there, then returning to report and engender further discussion and debate back at their workplace. Note that there is no reduction of the frequency or role of Teachers Associations meetings under this proposal.

(Under another proposal later in this section, TAFE colleges would be included in this more decentralised approach. This would facilitate greater understanding and solidarity between schools and TAFE colleges.)

The above proposal will probably elicit criticism based on an interpretation that it diminishes the current degree of democratic input by members in the peak decision-making forums of Council and Annual Conference. The counter to this argument is that the change would facilitate much more democratic participation and ownership of decisions and debate by workplace Federation Representatives who number about 2400 state-wide. This proposal would bolster the status and responsibility of Federation Councillors in their local areas, involve Federation Representatives in more thorough and comprehensive debate, and move more decision-making power closer to the workplace.

Federation can also look at ways to better support its Federation Representatives. The Queensland Teachers Union spent \$50,000 to provide a comprehensive, up-to-date Union Reps kit to every workplace in the state. This is an initiative worth copying. It is rare for a new Federation

Representative to be elected to the job and find an up-to-date file on essential information. Again, this is consistent with the organising model, as Federation Representatives with more information at hand are able to rely less on the service of the full-time Officer and more on themselves to handle issues and problems at the workplace.

“The Associations and the Aboriginal Members Roll should be where activism is nurtured and members gain experience in Federation activities.”

These forums should be one of the hubs of Federation activism, but not too many Associations can boast this. Associations provide an important focus for Federation Representatives and members to gather regularly, exchange information from their workplaces, glean information from the ‘centre’ and pass it on to their colleagues. Associations are also an important link between workplaces and the Executive and Council, with motions being forwarded on to these forums from the ‘grassroots’.

Many Association meetings can be rather staid, passive and non-activist in nature. A real attempt needs to be undertaken to review the way Association meetings function, with a view to increasing the participation of all Federation Representatives and adjusting the way business is conducted to make them more fulfilling forums of debate and action. Currently, a good metropolitan Association meeting attendance is to have half the schools in that area represented. There is considerable scope for improvement.

The two hours, after-school timing of Association meetings is predicated on the expectation that Fed Reps and members are sufficiently motivated and interested to make the effort to attend. This is not necessarily the case. The previously mentioned proposal to have full-day Federation Representatives’ training days as special Association meetings or regional assemblies is one way of addressing this issue.

With the nation moving towards reconciliation with Australia’s indigenous people, so movingly symbolised in the magnificent Corroboree 2000 walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Federation should continue its strong tradition of fostering links with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and communities. This is a crucial aspect of our social justice charter, and should be promoted more at the Association level as a means to progress indigenous issues.

“Federation Council exists to ensure the voice of the practising teacher is heeded. Consequently, the Federation must actively promote a Council which is representative of all sections of the membership, including younger members and women.”

Funding must be allocated to ensure that the newer generation of teachers is able to participate in Council meetings, even as observers, and be supported by a program designed to interest, motivate and empower them to participate more fully in Federation activities and forums. A New Teachers Network could be established, with a training program built into each Council meeting that facilitates their participation.

There could be a structured opportunity for it to report to the Council and Executive and for its members to participate in the debates of the day.

This could be done by re-allocating funding from Trade Union Training (TUT). The disadvantage of a separate TUT course for beginning teachers, or one overseen by the TUT Officer, is that it separates the newer generation from their experienced Councillor colleagues and from the culture and practice of a Council day. There may be some need for separate activities, but a balance should be found between these and integration into the business of the day. There should be a social event to coincide with each Council meeting, which would enable the newer and the experienced members to socialise. Much of the foundation of healthy political culture is built through the informal interaction of members.

Significantly and symbolically, the organisation and control of a New Teachers Network should be placed in the hands of those members themselves. They may need the advice and support of Organisers and other Officers, but they need to be ‘let loose’ enough to make things happen for themselves. Again, the existing practice on women’s issues is an example here.

“Federation must remain an effective and efficient union, run democratically with a broad focus encompassing social justice issues and using active recruitment.”

In this section, a number of key areas of the Federation’s operations are considered, namely, alliances with other members of the education community; industrial, professional and welfare services; the effectiveness of the trade union training program; the role of Officers, and the role and function of Federation offices. The commentary aims at developing greater effectiveness and efficiency, encouraging more participatory democracy, and strengthening activism, all in the context of a genuine commitment to social justice unionism.

Alliances with other members of the education community

The model of organisation that would help develop community alliances exists in the Public Education Lobby approach. These groups are based on a direct approach to principals and parents to link with teachers to defend and promote public education in local state and federal electorates. In strengthening its alliances, the Federation must make a concerted move to link up with principals across NSW, both through their peak organisations and through Organisers’ contacts with principals in their local associations. This is crucial.

The current salaries campaign has highlighted the disrespect the employer has for principals, and has encouraged principals to recognise that the Federation is their union and their bulwark against government and department attacks. A pointed example is the Minister’s repeated, deceitful attacks on principals for not spending their school’s funds. But even before this development, principals were exhibiting more willingness than they did in the mid-1990s to become advocates for their schools, in the manner that private school principals have always done. Public school principals are

potentially the most important lobbyists and advocates for public education that we have. Principals enjoy a respect in the community, the media and political circles that Federation Representatives and teachers and parents don't necessarily have.

The employer recognises the 'clout' our principal members have, as evidenced in the manner in which some principals were attacked for speaking publicly about the casual teacher shortage in 1999. On the issue of public school funding and the need to lobby politicians across the spectrum, the power of principals as lobbyists and advocates should not be underestimated by the Federation. They are the key link in the public education alliance.

Associate Professor Alan Reid of the University of South Australia recognised this in "The national education agenda: Implications for leadership in Australian schools", a paper delivered to a symposium for school leaders on September 22, 1997:

"Principals must become political activists... Political activists rarely succeed unless they link up with other groups and act collectively... The major industrial and professional voice for educators in the public system is the Australian Education Union. It would be severely weakened if principals were to leave it, and for their part principals would find themselves industrially vulnerable. Both the union and its principal members need, as a matter of urgency, to recognise how the positioning of principals, as marketeers and line-managers, is dividing education workers against one another.

"A second step is to recognise that, if principals are to be educational leaders in their schools, it is incumbent upon them also to be educational leaders in a wider sphere. This means that all principals should be aware of where decisions are made, who the key players are, and what the channels of influence are... The key thing is to share information and to engage in the process of influencing, as well as responding to, policy developments.

"But the most important issue facing us all at the present historical moment is the way in which public education is being redefined. If any group should have a stance on this, it should be principals... Somehow, principals must find a way to accommodate the exigencies of the immediate and the local, with participation in the wider debates."

Remember, the current generation of principals are the ones most likely to support the core values, beliefs and ideals of the public education system, given that most began their teaching in the years when public education was more positively regarded and respected than it is today, when values of social justice and equity were not trampled in the political rush to privatise, deregulate, devolve and undermine.

Most principals began their teaching in a socio-economic environment where it would have been regarded as a national disgrace if a recently-privatised telecommunications company like Telstra announced a \$2 billion half-year profit simultaneously with a 10,000 jobs cut. Now it's seen as a sign of the times, in a society that is becoming increasingly numb to the effects of such economic and social van-

dalism. As seen in the *60 Minutes* television portrayal of the private versus public school debate on March 19, 2000, it was the principal of the public high school in Sydney who proved to be the most powerful spokesperson for public education. Sincere, genuinely concerned for the future of our society, and committed to justice and fairness. That's the kind of advocate we need to link up with in every school and college and in every community across the state.

On a practical level, the Federation should seek to negotiate with the principal organisations on how local Organisers and other Federation Officers can build stronger links with principals. Speaking at district principal meetings, presenting sessions at staff meetings on professional issues, communicating more regularly, making the time to liaise with and assist principals in their difficult 'between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place' role — all should be canvassed as options for strengthening relationships.

The sense of urgency that Pocock and Wishart emphasised should arise from the Department of Education and Training's move to introduce individual contract employment for principals in NSW. This is yet another example of the degree to which the employer and the government recognise the crucial role of principals in the public education alliance. The current, long-serving Director-General has for years sought to split principals from their union.

For its part, the Federation should work harder to dispel the notion that principals are the employer's representatives in the workplace, and therefore on 'the other side', while for their part, principals should re-assess the assumption still held by some that the Federation is anti-principal and intent on making the job of administering a school more difficult for them. For example, the introduction of revised teacher appraisal procedures provides an opportunity to reassure principals that Federation is there to assist in the implementation of a fair-to-all-involved teacher appraisal process, rather than obstruct it. More of this kind of work needs to be done.

Drawing on the concept of what is called social movement unionism in North America, we should acknowledge the need to link up in local communities with social welfare organisations, other unions, parents, local businesses, and sporting and cultural groups, to promote public education. Federation has not done anywhere near enough work in this area, again not out of any deliberate act, but more as a product of the roll from one immediate priority or campaign to the next. This trend has to be arrested.

It was a great experience to be in Milwaukee in November last year, when Bob Peterson and Michael Charney launched their book, *Transforming Teacher Unions — Fighting for Better Schools and Social Justice*. The authors argue for a rethinking of teacher union strategy in the face of the threats confronting public education. They define their vision of social justice unionism as comprising three components:

- defending public education and the rights of teachers
 - strong emphasis on professionalism
 - commitment to children and community.
- Peterson outlines his recommendations for rethinking strategy:

"Social justice unionism views itself as part of a broader movement for social progress rather than

merely focused on narrow self interest. It calls for participatory union membership, education reform to serve all children, collaboration with community organisations, and a concern for broader issues of equity.”

Federation can proudly stand on its record of social justice unionism, but to further develop that tradition, we should consider the insights and ideas collected in this book.

Industrial, professional and welfare services

Consideration of Federation’s services and role fits in with an evaluation being undertaken by teacher unions worldwide. In the USA, a debate is occurring among many unions as they work to better balance their priorities and overall orientation. In 1996 the Teacher Union Reform Network was founded comprising 21 local union presidents from the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). This network aims to re-orient teacher unionism to more strongly emphasise school reform, teacher professionalism and student achievement as priorities, alongside a maintained commitment to industrial and political campaigning. With the greater goal of preserving public education from the attacks of the Right, these teacher unions are looking to move beyond the more traditional adversarial model of unionism to one that is more collaborative with the stakeholders in public education and more closely aligned with local communities. A similar orientation for the NSW Teachers Federation has been recommended at various points in this report.

What is emerging in this debate in the US is the emphasis on advocacy on professional and educational issues, with a deliberate attempt to confront the attacks about teacher quality, student achievement and school performance. Bob Chase, President of the NEA, in an article in *Transforming Teacher Unions*, wrote:

“Industrial-style, adversarial tactics simply are not suited to the next stage of school reform. After much soul-searching and self-criticism within NEA, we know that it’s time to create a new union – an association with an entirely new approach to our members, to our critics, and to our colleagues on the other side of the bargaining table.”

Tom Mooney echoes this view as President of the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers in Ohio when he writes in the same book:

“In the context of union-led school reform, professionalism calls out the best impulses in our memberships, allowing us to win majority support for the necessary changes in union policies that pave the way for advancing creative and sometimes bold proposals at the bargaining table or in public policy arenas. It builds on teachers’ desire for professional respect, status, and pay, but also appeals to their commitment to kids. It challenges and empowers teachers to adopt research-based best practices rather than clinging to tradition or being pushed to adopt the latest fads.

“...[Professionalism] has helped us make a case for reaching out to parents and participating in struggles to improve our students’ lives outside of school... For

American Federation of Teachers locals, participation in the broader labor movement also drives our involvement with broader social issues. It’s hard not to get drawn into battles for school funding equity, worthy wages for child-care workers, anti-sweatshop campaigns, exposing tax abatements and other corporate welfare, etc.

“In my view, professionalism (accountability to our clients) is the most powerful framework for winning teachers to the movement for meaningful education reform, which may be the key to saving public education.”

This is challenging stuff to many NSW Teachers Federation members, steeped as we are in the adversarial mode of campaigning for our students’ learning conditions and our own working conditions. It is the time, however, to scrutinise how we prioritise and campaign. Federation campaigners have fought for more than a decade to stop the rolling bandwagon of policy change, with limited success. Would climbing onto the wagon to steer it more to where we want to go be a more successful tactic? While this approach may not be directly transferable to the Australian context, it nonetheless indicates the degree to which teacher unions elsewhere are exploring new ways of operating.

Federation’s Annual Conference statement referring to the union’s services as industrial, professional and welfare is pertinent here. While our fee structure is considerably less than our American counterparts, which means we have not the funds to provide the same array of professional services and educational resources, we nonetheless should be analysing whether we can better relate to our members in the professional and educational domain. It is difficult not to concede that Federation is ‘off the pace’ of current curriculum and educational debate. We need to find ways of buying ourselves back into the debates that occur in schools and colleges on the range of educational and professional matters. There was an attempt once to create the Centre for Teaching and Learning within the Federation to stimulate educational thinking and debate. What chance of new initiatives in this area? How can we better facilitate debate within union forums on the educational issues of the day? One-off conferences and other sporadic attempts to achieve this have not really brought us to the centre of these debates.

As mentioned previously, Bob Peterson has helped establish Rethinking Schools, an independent not-for-profit educational publisher. Its quarterly publication by the same name is “a well-respected grassroots journal for public school reform. Winner of national awards for excellence, it offers jargon-free articles that tackle some of the hardest issues in public education, along with many classroom-based activities and ideas”.

Federation should investigate the possibility of initiating a similar venture here in Australia, perhaps in conjunction with the Australian Education Union and its state affiliates.

When visiting the Rethinking Schools office in Milwaukee in November last year, there was something true and reassuring in its hands-on, down-to-earth, classroom-centred approach to education politics and debate. The launch of *Transforming Teacher Unions* was a non-commercial, people-oriented event in a local bookstore, where teachers, uni-

versity students, parents, and interested community members gathered to hear the latest on where public school teacher unions are heading. The launch had an encouraging community feel to it, reinforcing one of the central tenets of Rethinking Schools' philosophy, namely, that public school teachers must link up with local communities in the pursuit of better public schools and social justice.

A research and publications approach akin to what I've suggested in a newer members program is worth exploring here. Perhaps we'd be better served by a mix of full-time research officers and a 'secondment' based approach. We could bring teachers in to conduct research on current 'hot' topics in schools and colleges. This would facilitate research by the classroom practitioners actually bearing the weight of current issues and changes. Such research could become the material for a more educational, magazine-type publication distributed by the Federation in print and on the Internet.

The above approach could go some way towards bridging the gap between teacher-unionists who are primarily concerned with their industrial working conditions and those with a greater interest in educational issues. This is not a



Bob Peterson and Michael Charney.

clear cut division, but nonetheless it is unhealthy for a union to allow such a gap to become too wide and entrenched. Bob Peterson touches on this when writing of the importance of genuine democracy and rank-and-file involvement in teacher unions when reviewing *United Mind Workers: Unions and Teaching in the Knowledge Society*:

"There has been a historic divide in many teacher unions between those who commit themselves to union activities and politics — an almost full-time occupation in addition to teaching, if one hopes to influence the union — and those who commit themselves to professional teaching practices such as starting innovative schools, leading district curriculum committees, or participating in state and national professional organisations. This historic division reinforces other pressures that keep teacher

unions focused on issues of wages and hours. What gets lost, as a result, is a union emphasis on broader educational reforms."

Mindful of trends in American teacher unions, we should consider re-orienting ourselves towards more open and forceful advocacy for teacher quality and educational standards. The NSW Teachers Federation should be identified as the advocate for quality teaching and learning. We should not be so easily positioned as we have been on the side of the struggling teacher, wearing the criticism that we are obstructing the employer and government's attempts to lift the quality of teaching through teacher appraisal processes.

We should certainly maintain our line of support for teachers experiencing difficulties in their performance, but there are ways other than the current full-time Welfare Officer approach. In Milwaukee, for example, the teachers union was working with the District Board to provide practising teachers as mentors and support for struggling teachers. A union-initiated Teacher Evaluation and Mentoring (TEAM) program has helped teachers improve. Where a teacher's performance has not been improved, this program has had some role in the decision for more than 20 teachers to resign in the last two years. In Cincinnati public schools, teacher evaluation is a shared responsibility of the teaching profession and the employer through the Peer Assistance and Evaluation Program.

We should review our welfare services, and evaluate the degree to which the union is doing the employer's work here. Is it appropriate that we allocate the vast resources we do to welfare and legal services, when public education as a system has suffered such a massive decline in its share of the provision of education in Australia? At what cost to our political and industrial and educational objectives is this welfare work conducted? Federation should explore whether we can continue to provide the degree of support we do in this area. By redefining how much support we give, how much money we spend on legal services, and by re-emphasising the employer's responsibilities in this area, we could perhaps free more resources for encouraging greater participation of members at the workplace in union campaigns.

On the question of expenditure on the welfare needs of members, a colleague from the Netherlands teacher union lamented how much money was spent on their lawyers. In the opinion of that colleague, such a high expenditure on welfare/legal matters was out of kilter with the union's primary objectives. It can be argued that this expenditure is quite disproportionate to the needs of the majority of members, and that the majority of members are having their interests forsaken as funds are allocated away from campaigns that affect all members.

Related to a consideration of providing welfare support through the current number of full-time Welfare Officers, it can be argued that the establishment of an additional Industrial Officer position and an additional Welfare Officer position in the last administrative restructure was a mistake. This resulted from a workload-based argument by the Officer corps rather than a strategic analysis of the union's priorities. The Royal Commission of inquiry into child protection at that time generated a lot of heat, pressure and work for the Federation to protect its members, but the effect of creating



additional head-office-based positions contradicts the arguments for the organising model of unionism. To act on this model, priority should be given to maintaining Officer positions that engender activism and participation in workplaces and the Federation's forums, and restructuring others to support this strategy. The total number of positions need not be reduced, but some could be restructured or converted to 'secondment-type' positions to facilitate the participation of currently practising teachers in specific focus programs such as women and newer teachers.

The effectiveness of the trade union training program

The single Officer approach to Trade Union Training should be reviewed, with consideration of an alternative program that is delivered by Organisers, Councillors and activists and other Officers on a needs basis, as happens in Queensland. There are ways of delivering this training other than the centralised approach currently in place.

Furthermore, some of the resources currently expended on Trade Union Training could be reallocated to fund the full-day special association meetings or regional assemblies mentioned previously. Federation Representatives could have training and development sessions delivered on these days as required, with some of the trainers being their experienced Federation colleagues and Councillors.

The role of Officers, and the role and location of Federation offices

The most significant change to propose here is to amalgamate our post-compulsory education unit with our schools unit. The merger between Technical and Further Education and Schools is being forced by the employer, and it is timely for us to 'save TAFE' by amalgamating it with the industrially stronger schools sector.

Schools Organisers should be trained to cover TAFE colleges, and vice versa for TAFE Organisers. There may be some difficult adjustments to make, but these are not insurmountable, just as schools Organisers with a high school background have to learn about infants/primary schools.

Research Officers who change to Industrial Officer positions have to learn the different aspects of the new job, just as teachers coming in to Welfare have to adjust. It could be done with TAFE and schools Organisers. With all the changes occurring in the post-compulsory area, with vocational education, the collegiate education plan with its multi-campus facilities, joint schools/TAFE courses, and the schools-TAFE portability clause in the new salaries and conditions award, it makes sense to make the adjustment now.

The Assistant General Secretary (Post-School Education), or a similar position in a restructured Officer corps, should be retained to maintain the TAFE identity and profile within the Federation, as well as to provide the appropriate level of oversight and expertise to Organisers serving both schools and TAFE colleges.

TAFE would be strengthened at the workplace and area level through member participation in local Teachers Associations across NSW. The current arrangements with regional offices would also assist in the delivery of service to TAFE colleges across the state. For this amalgamation to suc-

The advertisement features a central image of the journal cover with the headline "What is the Purpose Of Assessment?". To the right, text describes the journal as an independent quarterly newspaper committed to equity and social justice, written by teachers, parents, and educational activists. It lists subscription rates: Two-year \$20 (saves \$5.00) and One-year \$12.50. It also provides contact information for bulk orders and a website link. A quote from Jonathan Kozol is included at the bottom left of the ad.

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ceed, there would have to be a thorough training program in place for all Officers endeavouring to learn about the new sector they are to service.

When considering the number and location of Federation offices, this should be done in the context of technological advances in recent years. With Country Organisers spending so much time on the road, staying in motel accommodation, and with available computer, fax and telecommunications technology, a review on the viability of maintaining all existing regional offices is warranted.

This is not a suggestion to close down any particular office nor diminish the resource and staff support needed by Country Organisers. If it can be shown that the existence of a particular office enhances the activism of the union in a particular location, then it should remain. If local associations, Country Organisers, and a majority of people in Federation's decision-making forums are supportive of current arrangements, then that view will prevail in our decision-making forums. Nonetheless, technological advances make it worth a review, particularly with the organising model of unionism in mind.

Most messages in our society are transmitted through the mass media and, given the reliance of the citizenry on this 'babble', it has been intentional to base many references for this report on it. There is just the tip of it here, of course, as computer-based information technology has barely been mentioned. We know the power of radio and television, and the e-world is rapidly expanding its reach.

The television in the corner of a main room of nearly every home in developed countries, the car, home and workplace radio, and the newspaper read on the trains and at the breakfast table and in the lunch break, have replaced community elders, the church and the local library as the source of opinion and information for most citizens today. Factoring this into strategic thinking and planning is therefore essential.

This report also acknowledges, through references to academic research and analysis, the need to be more

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learned, considered and professional in our organisational approach. The assumption that we are an organisation staffed and led by educators has, rather ironically, hindered our ability to look beyond ourselves for better ways of operating. Just as we should engage professional consultants in dealing with the mass media, so too should we use advice and support from academics and other unions to hone and refine our organisational structure and operation.

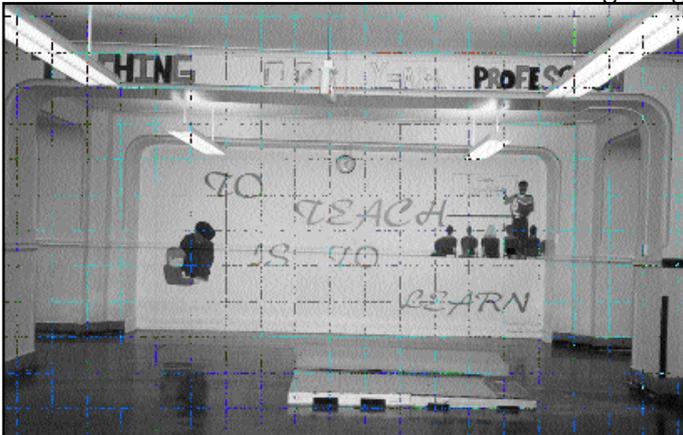
Not to be ignored, too, is the outstanding work of Rethinking Schools, which has shown the way in building bridges between teacher unionists as industrial activists and as classroom teachers, and in bringing together the complex array of tendencies and tensions in contemporary education politics. As the 'baby-boomers' retire from teaching during the next decade, this bringing-together will be crucial in developing the newer generation of teacher unionists.

Help abounds in our search for a better way to advance our cause. This is not a time to be insular or isolated. It is a time, however, to be urgent in our actions. Complacency is just not an option. Elaine Bernard has been writing on this theme for many years. In a paper entitled "New Initiatives, New Technology, New Labour," she wrote:

"There is a common thread running through the struggles... Labour is trying to increase its strength by breaking down the separation between producers and consumers. Unions are making issues such as deregulation, centralisation, and care of the handicapped into issues of public policy. Workers as the producers and deliverers of services are beginning to recognise that they have expertise and the right to propose their own alternatives.

"But at the moment, labour is still responding to management's agenda. It is concentrating on opposing what it does not want. The challenge before labour today is to develop a positive vision of what it wants. It is not adequate for labour to just oppose management's agenda. The labour movement has a unique opportunity to break out of established routines and organisation modes and re-establish itself as a source of change in society. For labour this transformation is not an academic discussion, it is a question of life or death."

The idealism and commitment mentioned at the beginning



Shared responsibility in Cincinnati: inside the Hughes Centre.

of this report can not be underestimated. *Teaching is believing that it really makes a difference.* Our greatest strength is the nature of our membership. Teachers are people who care, who understand more about the human heart and the human mind than most. Every day of our working lives, we give of ourselves to our students. That relationship is special. On observing students quietly at work one day, many years ago, I described it like this:

*A warmth,
a kinship of a new and meaningful kind
has developed
and is developing still
among us.
They're full of dreams
ambition
good intention
and hope.
That's it...
Hope.
There's something of me
and my hope too,
tucked away in each of their tomorrows...
And I trust them with it.*

The worth of what we do drives us to become strong unionists. Just as it is too important not to care about our students, it is too important not to care about the quality of public education and our union. It is our belief in the power of education that will motivate us to improve and refine our endeavours as a 21st century teacher union. We must determine the major priorities, work cleverly and clearly within our social, political and economic context, develop the strategies and implement the necessary organisational reform. It is, after all, for a great and noble cause, as Alan Reid reminds us:

"Public schools don't just exist to serve the public by educating individuals. They actually turn a group of individuals with a host of differences into a civic entity we call a 'public'. This is because they represent a place where common ground is made and where a sense of the common good is fashioned."

It is possible to underestimate the value of what we do as teachers, and what we achieve through our membership of the Teachers Federation. As an 18-year-old clerk in a provincial city commercial office, I worked with a good bloke who went on to lead the state branch of a white-collar union. Many years later, I met up with him and told him of my employment as an Organiser with the Teachers Federation. His eyes lit up, glinting with a trace of envy and admiration. "Ah, the teachers... Now that's a union that gets things done, that has a go. Good on you." Why are we different? Because we have a unique and essential role in this society, and our work is fuelled by idealism.

Not many teachers will ever receive a letter from a student, like the one below, on the occasion of his winning the Nobel Prize for Literature. Not many, no, but the sentiment should resonate for all of us:

"19 November 1957
Dear Monsieur Germain,

1999 Eric Pearson Report

I let the commotion around me these days subside a bit before speaking to you from the bottom of my heart. I have just been given far too great an honour, one I neither sought nor solicited. But when I heard the news, my first thought, after my mother, was of you. Without you, without the affectionate hand you extended to the small poor child that I was, without your teaching, your example, none of all this would have happened. I don't make too much of this sort of honour. But at least it gives me an opportunity to tell you what you have been and still are for me, and to assure you that your efforts, your work, and the generous heart you put into it still live in one of your little schoolboys who, despite the years, has never stopped being your grateful pupil. I embrace you with all my heart.
Albert Camus"

The quality of our society, the nature of the world we share, the common good, are built on the efforts, work and generous hearts of public education teachers everywhere. These attributes will nourish our union and strengthen us for the pursuit of new ways to deliver us our future.

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Sadly, I won't remember all the names and faces, but I will never forget the warmth, hospitality, friendship and solidarity of teacher unionists around the world. In Brisbane, Vancouver (BC), San Francisco, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, Boston, Dublin, Tralee, Amsterdam, Utrecht, and Deventer, and at points in between, the support I received was wonderful. My deepest thanks to you all. I also thank the NSW Teachers Federation for granting me the great opportunity to undertake this study.

References

Acknowledgements