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A national teaching profession?

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During the 1980s and early 90s under the Commonwealth Labor government there were several interrelated developments that promoted a more national teaching profession: federal industrial registration, award restructuring, the international movement of teacher 'professionalisation', the special Accord relationships between the Commonwealth and unions, as well as the Commonwealth government-initiated moves towards a more national schooling system. While there is an obvious difference between 'national' and 'Commonwealth government supported', these initiatives did go beyond coordination, consistency and coherence among school systems.

For the teaching profession, being 'national' involves a high level of common identity and common supportive activity among teachers working in the different government and non-government school systems, as well as formal national structures and relationships (which might be matters of Commonwealth jurisdiction, such as federal industrial registration of the teacher unions). Australian teachers are not employed by national agencies, so the tendency to be 'national' is closely tied to the tendency to be 'professional' in the sense of going beyond the particular employer-

employee relationships in which teachers find themselves. Whether or not teaching is a national profession is a subjective and objective matter. Many teachers have a sense of themselves not only as part of a national profession, but as part of an international profession. Teachers can have a sense of themselves as part of a profession with a long history that has shaped the way they work, their competencies and aspirations, and their responsibilities for the future of the profession.

Teaching is a mass occupation — in 1995 there were 220,815 teachers in Australian schools, about 70 per cent employed by State and Territory government school authorities, the rest by non-government school authorities. As such a large group of employees, mostly in superficially undifferentiated roles, teachers have not the income, status or 'autonomy' traditionally associated with professionals. This does not necessarily make them less professional; however, being recognised as professional is a constant struggle for teachers.

Assertions of teacher professionalism very often involve real or apparent infringements of the management prerogatives of school authorities — for example the struggle against 'payment by results' a century ago (see below), and the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association's (VSTA) 'control of entry' campaign of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Victorian Secondary Teachers Association 1974, 3). The employer-employee relationship and the inherent conflicts between professional autonomy (whether collective or individual) and management prerogatives provide constraints within which teacher professionalism must operate.

School teachers' major professional representative organisations are their unions. This has important implications. First, the strength and credibility of teacher unions is related to their industrial role, which is largely bounded by the industrial frameworks in which teachers operate. In both the government and non-government sectors those frameworks have been established by State and Territory legislation, and cover those particular States and Territories. Only since the mid-1980s has the federal industrial arena been open to teachers, though, for the foreseeable future their main industrial activity is likely to retain a State and Territory focus. Second, there is a common, but certainly not universal, belief in an inherent contradiction between the industrial and the professional — this has put some constraints on the value which some unions and their members have given to 'professional' work, and to the external credibility of unions as professional representative organisations (Preston 1996). Third, the teacher unions do not (with minor exceptions) have industrial coverage of universities, thus education researchers and teacher educators in

universities are not members of the major representative organisations of the teaching profession. This has resulted in a historical divide between practitioners on the one hand, and the educators of and researchers for the profession on the other. Thus the ambit of teachers' professional work has not generally been seen to encompass the development of the professional 'knowledge base' through research, or the formal initial and continuing education of the profession. The more complete development of a national teaching profession requires this widening of the ambit of what is accepted as teachers' professional work.

Early developments of a national teaching profession

For more than a century in Australia a national teaching profession has waxed and waned. Early national professional identity was associated with the formation of teacher unions and associations — some time before there was an Australian nation. There was a high degree of mobility of teachers between the colonies and many had worked as teachers overseas. Teachers' conditions of employment were often poor and haphazard, and it was clear to the mobile teachers that there was much benefit in collective organisation and drawing from the experiences of teacher organisations elsewhere. Professional satisfaction and development, as well as the protection and improvement of conditions, could be gained from the formation of associations and from communication between teachers well beyond the range of their direct employment. The popular and influential journal, *Australasian Schoolmaster and Literature Review*, which circulated for decades from the 1880s and was closely associated with the Victorian State School Teachers Union, was read by teachers throughout Australia, assisting their professional development and their common identity as professional teachers and, in many cases, as members of teacher unions — an identity that transcended their relationships with their employers and the daily grind of their work.

In January 1901 a Federal Educational Congress was held in Melbourne which illustrates the dynamic nature of the national teaching profession of the time (Selleck 1982, 126–127). To mark the founding of the Commonwealth, the Victorian State School Teachers Union organised the congress with the cooperation of the Victorian Education Department. A 'large body' of delegates attended, representing teachers from the six States and New Zealand. Those who addressed the congress included teacher union officials, government ministers, and other leading public figures, including Frank Tate, who was to become Victoria's first Director of

Education the following year. Tate was to give the concluding address, but the death of Queen Victoria cut proceedings short. His intended speech was published with the proceedings, and indicated the spirit of the occasion — the sense of confident professionalism transcending the demeaning requirements of some school authorities. It began:

We may yet see the belated and purblind Payment by Results system driven from this his last twilight resting place to flit hooting away before the oncoming dawn. Everywhere the leaven is working and heaving, coming to the surface in the remote country congresses of teachers, in Training College exhibitions of teaching aids, in the new interest in educational literature (quoted in Selleck 1982, 127).

In 1921 the Australian School Teachers Federation (ASTF) was formed at a national conference of teacher unionists initiated by the New South Wales Teachers Federation (Spaull and Hince 1986, 227). The Australian School Teachers Federation sought the establishment by the Commonwealth government of a national bureau of education — teacher unions have historically promoted a greater Commonwealth role in schooling and more coherent national schooling throughout Australia (for example, the Australian Education Union's recent discussion paper, *Creating an Education Nation for the Year 2000*, Marginson, Martin and Williamson 1995). The Federation also supported the formation of a new union, the Federated State School Teachers Association of Australia (FSSTAA). The Federated State School Teachers Association of Australia was structured to be eligible for federal industrial registration, which was achieved in 1924. The focus was then on the national industrial (rather than more broadly professional) arena as industrial difficulties arose in a number of States. In 1928 the Federated State School Teachers Association of Australia sought arbitration over logs of claims for teachers in Tasmania and Victoria. The matter ended up in the High Court where it was determined that teachers could not have access to the federal industrial arena because government schooling was not an 'industry' (Preston 1983). The consequent industrial ineffectiveness led to a series of changes finally resulting in the formation in 1937 of the Australian Teachers Federation (ATF), with an emphasis on the educational and professional, rather than the industrial (Spaull and Hince 1984, 231–232).

The Australian Teachers Federation was without a national secretariat and had little ongoing support from its constituent organisations — the government sector teachers unions in the States and Territories. However, it played a role in the national and international scene. It affiliated with the

Council for Equal Pay in 1942; took up the issues of inspection and the standard of teacher education (proposing in 1943 an Australian Teachers Certificate); attended the founding conferences of UNESCO in 1945 and the World Confederation of Teachers' Organisations and Professions in 1952; as well as taking up matters such as the level of education funding by the States (Spaull and Hince 1984, 232–233). Even so, for most teachers the lack of strong channels of communication between them and the national body, the lack of formal national structures associated with their work, and the immediate demands on them through the war and the development of overcrowded mass education though to the mid-1970s, militated against a strong national profession.

The role of the Australian Teacher Federation expanded with the new federal roles in schooling carved out by the Whitlam government. The key was the establishment of the Schools Commission in 1973 on which the Australian Teacher Federation (and the national government sector parent organisation, the Australian Council of State School Organisations, ACSSO) had representation. The Australian Teacher Federation's financial base improved, and it maintained a strong secretariat and funded regular meetings of the executive and various committees with representatives from the affiliate unions in the States and Territories. Reports on Australian Teacher Federation activities in affiliate journals, and, from the mid-1980s, publications (or inserts) produced by the Australian Teacher Federation itself and distributed to members, helped further develop the national profile. However, for most teachers in government schools their identity was primarily with their local union, and bounded by the domain of their employer. This was also the general case for teachers in non-government schools, whose union structure was similar, if generally weaker.

During this period many teachers were concerned, individually and collectively through the unions and subject associations, with professional issues such as curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. Supported by Commonwealth programs such as the Disadvantaged Schools Program, Innovations Program and national movements such as the women's movement and Aboriginal rights, national networks developed around particular issues and programs, where teachers worked with parents, academics and community organisations. Research, scholarship, professional learning and practical innovation were involved. There was often little support from the employing school authorities (other than by default: policies of the time often encouraged greater local autonomy in matters such as curriculum) — work on these issues depended on the enthusiasm of committed teachers in a teaching service then dominated

by teachers in their twenties and thirties. There was thus personal enthusiasm, but little formal infrastructural support, for such broad teacher professionalism. Special interest national networks developed, but did not connect with all teachers throughout Australia in a way which could be considered a 'national profession'. The infrastructural support necessary for a stronger national profession began to develop in the 1980s.

The emergence of a national teaching profession since the mid-1980s

In June 1983 the federal industrial arena again opened up to school teachers when the High Court, in a decision referring to Commonwealth-employed youth workers, overturned previous rulings and accepted the definition of an industrial dispute as essentially any dispute between employers and employees (Preston 1983). Registration was achieved in the mid-1980s for the Australian Teachers Union (ATU, now Australian Education Union, AEU) and the Independent Teachers Federation (ITF, now Independent Education Union, IEU).

The authority of the federally registered unions in relation to their 'branches' in the various States and Territories was stronger than that of the preceding national organisations in relation to their more autonomous 'affiliates' (though some of the State-registered affiliates still operate as 'associated bodies'). This structural change directly facilitated the emergence of a more national profession. It created a stronger link with practising teachers through the branch structure and the higher profile among the membership possible through the increased resources of the national organisations. This led to greater external credibility — the national unions could be seen by the Commonwealth government and other parties as being able to 'deliver' — to speak credibly for teachers, in a way that had often been difficult with the previous organisations. This change should not be overstated, however. Much still depended on the leadership and personalities of relevant officers at the national and branch levels, and their relationships with governments, the media, and other external parties, as well as with members.

Federal industrial registration gave the Australian Teachers Union and the Independent Teachers Federation a stronger position within the Australian Council of Trade Unions. Thus the support and authority of the Australian Council of Trade Unions could be called on, which was important during the award restructuring negotiations of the late 1980s and early 90s, the subsequent 1991–1993 National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (NPQTL), and the Teaching Accord between the Commonwealth

and the teacher unions from October 1993 to the change of government in March 1996.

Award restructuring arose most directly out of the report on a 1987 mission to Western Europe by the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Trade Development Council, *Australia Reconstructed* (1987). The report was supported by the then Commonwealth Minister for Trade, John Dawkins, and gave particular emphasis to a consensus-based strategy to improve productivity through participation by workers and their unions in decision making from the workplace to the industry and national levels; skill development, recognition and utilisation; improved work organisation; the development of improved career paths; rationalisation of awards; and the development of a 'productive culture'. Award restructuring provided a coherent national framework linking education and the economy through employment — something further developed by John Dawkins who brought 'employment' into the portfolio when he became Minister for Employment, Education and Training in 1987.

Teachers' award restructuring involved:

- greater national consistency in salaries and conditions — especially the 'benchmark' salary levels;
- creation of Advanced Skills Teacher positions as promotion routes which recognise and reward good teaching and advanced skill development;
- elimination of barriers such as those which prevented experienced teachers with less than four years of training from having access to the top of incremental scales and eligibility to apply for promotion; and
- portability of entitlements, such as long service leave, between school employing authorities.

The Australian Teachers Union and the Independent Teachers Federation led their branches in negotiations that still had to be finally resolved at the State or Territory level. The unions were far better coordinated than the school authorities (who had had no pre-existing national industrial structure). The Commonwealth was very keen to support national consistency, and improvements in conditions, work organisation and teacher education consistent with the principles of award restructuring and its broader agenda for schooling; while the school authorities were particularly concerned to constrain expenditure and protect management prerogatives. Most of the basic 'industrial' matters covered by awards were resolved (or processes for resolution put in place). However, issues of work

organisation, teacher education, teaching standards, and the more complex aspects of portability of entitlements, were not amenable to the usual industrial processes. In 1990 the teacher unions, the school employing authorities, the Commonwealth and the Australian Council of Trade Unions agreed to the establishment of the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning to deal with those difficult matters. It was a three-year research and development project governed by those parties.

There were other influences leading to the development of the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning. Since the early 1980s there had been increasing international concern with and promotion of the quality of teaching and teachers, and with teacher professionalism. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) established a working party on the 'condition of teaching' in 1984 that coordinated research and consultations culminating in the publication of *The Teacher Today* (OECD 1990). Australia was actively involved in the process. Some issues were initially taken up by the Commonwealth Schools Commission in its 1987 project on Teacher Inservice Education (Boomer 1988). In response to the matters concerning teachers and teaching in Dawkins' May 1988 policy statement, *Strengthening Australia's Schools*, the Schools Council of the National Board for Employment, Education and Training embarked on a period of consultations, research and development which involved publications including *Teacher Quality: An Issues Paper* (Schools Council 1989) and *Australia's Teachers: An Agenda for the Next Decade* (Schools Council 1990).

Major themes taken up by the Schools Council included strategies to improve the quality of initial and continuing professional education; ensuring high standards of teacher competence and work through more explicit teaching standards and profession-controlled registration or other means; improving the public standing of the teaching profession; and enhancing teacher participation in decision-making from the school to the national level.

The Australian Education Council (the council of all State, Territory and Commonwealth ministers for education) had also been dealing with matters such as teacher education and registration. At its December 1990 meeting it considered a number of reports related to teacher professionalism (including the Schools Council reports), adopted a lengthy resolution, and 'agreed that the major forum of further work in this area will be the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning' (Australian Education Council 1990).

The activities of the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning were managed by three working parties representative of the various partners in the project and others as appropriate (for example, there were university representatives on the working party considering teacher education after some protest at the initial exclusion of academics). There were three major, concrete outcomes of the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning: the development of the Draft National Competency Framework for Beginning Teaching, which was published in final form after further refining in 1996; the establishment of the National Schools Project which has become the National Schools Network, now involving more than 300 schools around Australia; and the establishment of the Australian Teaching Council — though it was not directly formed by the National Projects on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (Preston 1996).

Another significant outcome of the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning involved the process itself — an intensive period of work by teacher union, school authority, Commonwealth and other representatives, working closely together, within a national framework, on issues of importance to the everyday work of teachers, the management of schools, and the national organisation of the teaching profession, teaching standards and teacher learning. In broad terms it was one model of industry-wide, consensual decision making which could ideally be part of award restructuring. It was more inclusive than the Australian Education Council because it involved the unions, on the one hand, and the non-government school authorities, on the other.

However, the continuation of these relationships at the national level has not occurred. The government sector school authorities and the Commonwealth have continued to meet through the Australian Education Council (which became the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs from the beginning of 1994), though national collaboration has been weak since July 1993. From 1993 until the March 1996 change of government, the Commonwealth and the two national teacher unions collaborated through the framework of the Teaching Accord.

The Accord between the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Australian Labor government had been periodically renegotiated from 1983. The 1992 agreement included a commitment to the development of an agreement between the government and the teachers unions on some central matters of schools policy. Such an agreement was negotiated and signed the following year — *The Agreement between the Commonwealth Government and the Teaching Profession through their Teacher Unions Providing for an Accord*

to Advance the Quality of Teaching and Learning (Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Education Union and Independent Education Union 1993). The Teaching Accord, as it is commonly called, detailed objectives and implementation strategies for Commonwealth-funded programs in areas of national priority for schools, including literacy, the middle years, post-compulsory education, the education of girls, Aboriginal education, and professional development.

The importance of the Teaching Accord was that it was negotiated and agreed between the parties — it was not a matter of simple consultation. Thus the unions were recognised as having a rightful place in the decision-making process. It was a recognition of the professional rights and responsibilities of teachers, through their unions, at the national level. However, the impact of the Accord always remained problematic given the non-involvement of the State employing authorities.

Other developments supportive of a national approach have included the strong national industrial role of the teacher unions, the Australian Teaching Council, the National Schools Network, the Innovative Links project and other National Professional Development Program projects, and the Chalk Circle. These will be considered in turn.

Both the Australian Education Union and the Independent Education Union have been active in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. In 1993 the Australian Education Union sought to negotiate a 'National Framework Agreement' directly with all State school authorities, but they refused to enter negotiations (Munro 1995, 14). In June that year the Australian Education Union served a log of claims on all State and Territory school authorities. Various disputes were found, and a number of federal awards and interim awards have since been made, though various State governments have applied, so far unsuccessfully, to the Commission to dismiss or not hear the Australian Education Union applications — some are firmly of the view that there is no 'national industry' of schooling (for example, R D Copeland of the Education Department of Western Australia, cited in Munro 1995, 48). In contrast, the Australian Education Union cases have included lengthy argument as to the national nature of Australian schooling and the Australian teaching profession (for example, Burrow 1995). In his statement in the application of a federal award for South Australian teachers, Australian Education Union federal secretary, Rob Durbridge noted the change in emphasis and direction of teacher unionism:

away from separately registered unions and towards the adoption of a national focus and approach. This approach was reinforced by the recognition of the substantial community of interest between

teachers and education workers employed in the various State and Territory education systems. Teachers in particular have in common a broad range of similar professional and industrial concerns, including registration, professional development and career structure and progression, work organisation, workloads, salaries, school resources and many more (Durbridge 1995, 4).

Durbridge also argued that pursuing essentially common objectives through multiple State and Territory tribunals resulted in a great deal of industrial disputation, difficulties and inefficiencies. He also pointed out that union members:

are employed by State governments and thus are in the precarious position of being employed by an employer which has a capacity to affect the terms and conditions of employment by executive or legislative action and also by being the entity which can determine the composition and powers of State industrial tribunals. Accordingly, there has always been a need, in order to maintain confidence in any State system of regulation of State employees, for the State to keep separate and distinct its different roles as employer and legislator as well as guarantor of the independence of tribunals ... Unfortunately, in the past two years, the perception of the AEU members is that some State Governments have begun to confuse these roles and abuse their legislative and executive powers to advantage their role as employer (Durbridge 1995, 16).

The finding of Justice Munro generally supported the positions put forward by the Australian Education Union (Munro 1995). The activity of the Australian Education Union and the Independent Education Union in the federal industrial arena is likely to increase, even with new Commonwealth industrial relations legislation.

The Australian Teaching Council was formed in June 1993 on the initiative of the Commonwealth, working with a number of school authorities, the teacher unions and various other parties. The proposal had been developed by the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning, but not all the school authorities supported it, and, as all National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning decisions were made on the basis of consensus, its establishment could not be carried out. The issue of national teacher registration has been particularly problematic. There has been, from the beginning, a lack of clarity about the nature and role of the Australian Teaching Council (Preston 1995). Without support from all the school authorities, and without being able to offer individual teachers something

tangible and exclusive for their 'membership' fee, its long term viability is insecure, and the hope that it can implement a system of national teacher registration somewhat unrealistic. However, since its establishment the Australian Teaching Council has played a significant role in developing and supporting the infrastructure for a national teaching profession. It has provided a forum for discussion and collaboration on matters such as national standards for initial teacher education and the application of competency standards for beginning teaching. It also carries out exemplary, influential professional development activities. Its future appears even less secure with the new Howard Coalition government.

The National Schools Network provides, in large part, a model structure for national professional development. It is a cooperative project between the profession (represented through the teacher unions) and school authorities, with Commonwealth support. It involves action research at the school level that is thoroughly integrated with the work of individual teachers and the schools, with the objective of enhancing teachers' professional practice to improve student learning. It takes an integrated, whole school approach to change. Academics are involved as critical friends and resource people. The schools are strongly linked through the local cluster to State and national levels, with two-way channels of communication. While school authorities and the Commonwealth provide support, the network is largely controlled by the profession. The Innovative Links project of the Commonwealth-funded National Professional Development Program (NPDP) is similarly structured, and the two are linked and mutually supportive. Many other National Professional Development Program projects strengthen national professional coherence through professional development related to national priorities involving national professional associations such as subject associations, as well as teacher unions, school authorities, university academics, and the Commonwealth.

The National Schools Network, the Innovative Links and other National Professional Development Program projects involve university staff but do not seek the integrated transformation of faculties of education in the same way as they seek systemic school change (Yeatman and Sachs 1995, 40-45, 67). For teaching to become a strong national profession, coherence between practice and the research and professional education carried out in faculties of education must be further developed (Preston 1996). There has been a willingness to do this by organisations such as the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE), as well as teacher organisations.

In May 1995 the then Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, Ross Free, established the Chalk Circle, a 'dialogue on teacher education' involving a wide range of those involved in teacher education, including teacher organisations, university representatives, school authorities, and the Commonwealth. It was chaired by the Australian Council of Deans of Education, administered by the Australian Teaching Council, and it reported in November 1995 (Adey 1995). Among other recommendations, the Chalk Circle advocated the establishment of a National Teacher Education Network. It would be managed by a committee comprising the Australian Council of Deans and Education, teacher unions and professional organisations (including the National Schools Network, the Australian Teaching Council, and a representative of indigenous education organisations). It was proposed that the new body would establish and support partnerships between innovative faculties of education and networks of schools that could establish models for initial and continuing teacher education incorporating a range of features, including:

- personnel exchange between schools and universities;
- opportunities for research and site-based reform that involves teachers, and challenges the theory-practice divide;
- improved links between site-based research and other forms of university postgraduate research;
- better integration between provision of initial and continuing teacher education;
- opportunities for recognition of prior learning and credit transfer into academic awards and articulation arrangements appropriate to industry education and training needs (Adey 1995, 26-27).

Thus, a National Teacher Education Network would provide a basis for the general extension of school teacher professionalism into teacher education, and complement its extension into research supported by the National Schools Network and some National Professional Development Program projects. Integrated where possible with the National Schools Network, and linked to other networks and activities, a National Teacher Education Network could support the basic infrastructure for a strong national teaching profession.

However, these networks and other developments are associated with the previous Labor government, and are supported by funds it initiated. It must be asked, what is the future for a national teaching profession under a Coalition federal government?

The national teaching profession under a Coalition government

The Coalition's pre-election policies and statements, developed under Senator Robert Hill as shadow minister for education, were generally supportive of the continuing professionalisation of teachers. The *Schools and TAFE* policy (Liberal Party and National Party 1996) includes a section on 'Teacher quality' that begins:

The education of young Australians is a partnership between teachers, parents, education authorities and government. The challenges facing our teachers in modern Australia are greater than ever before. It is our teachers who hold the key to shaping the future of our children (p 12).

The policy commits the Coalition to the continuation of the National Professional Development Program, which gives a major role to teachers' representative organisations (subject associations and other organisations as well as unions). Most importantly, the policy states that:

The Coalition applauds the efforts of teachers to raise the status of the teaching profession and to enhance the professional standards of teachers. A Coalition Government will work closely with teachers to continue to raise the status of the profession and with State and Territory education authorities to ensure mutual recognition of teaching qualifications and experience across Australia (p 13).

In a letter to the Australian Council of Deans of Education before the election, Senator Hill expanded on this and related matters, and explicitly referred to 'teacher organisations':

I would like to stress that close and real consultation with all stakeholders, including the ACDE, will be the distinguishing feature of a Coalition Government ... The Coalition applauds the efforts of teachers and teacher organisations to enhance the status of the teaching profession and increase standards of professionalism. We will continue to support these efforts, and will work closely with States and Territories, non-government education authorities, universities, and teacher organisations to further enhance the status of the profession and to foster mutual recognition of qualifications and experience across Australia (Australian Council of Deans Education 1996, 1-2).

These pre-election positions are consistent with continuing Commonwealth support for a national teaching profession. However, there are major strands

in Coalition ideology and policy which are not conducive to a national profession. These are, first, the broad acceptance of public choice theory as an explanation for the behaviour of public sector employee organisations and as a guide to appropriate government responses to the positions of such organisations on what could broadly be considered professional issues; second, the Coalition's industrial relations policy may result in a weakening of the teacher unions; and, third, the general position on federalism and the wish to reduce Commonwealth expenditure and to eliminate 'duplication' by transferring some responsibilities to the States, especially in areas such as education, health and welfare.

The recognition by the previous government of the two national teacher unions as the representatives of teachers on professional (as well as industrial) matters through mechanisms such as the Teaching Accord, has played a key, if not always publicly apparent, role in the assertion of a national teaching profession. This Accord approach arises from 'corporatist' notions of the relationships between the Commonwealth and unions. It also incorporates the Whitlam Labor and Fraser Coalition governments' liberal consultative approach which was based on the recognition of the professional expertise of teacher union representatives (and the expertise of other 'stakeholders'), as well as the 'democratic participative' notions that see optimal outcomes arising from the involvement of interest groups in decision making as well as intrinsic democratic value in such participation. These liberal consultative and democratic participative approaches (if not the corporatist approach) are apparent in the pre-election policies and statements of the Coalition, developed under Senator Robert Hill as shadow minister for education.

This broad acceptance of the role of teacher unions (and similar representative organisations) in advice and decision making about schooling is in sharp contrast with the assumptions of public choice theory. The theoretical context and implications of public choice theory are discussed in detail by Simon Marginson in *Education and Public Policy in Australia* (Marginson 1993, 55–80). Public choice theory is essentially the application of neo-classical economics to the political sphere. Individuals act in self-interest, and cannot be altruistic. This applies to public officials (education department officers) and to other public sector workers such as teachers, whose interests are seen as contrary to those of ordinary taxpayers and the consumers of the services the teachers provide (parents and students). Public choice theory conceives of the nature of public education and other public (and publicly funded private) social services as largely an outcome of

'provider capture' where the workers in the service have manipulated governments (school authorities) to distort the service to serve their interests rather than those of the consumers and taxpayers. New Zealand has experienced the effects on the teaching profession of public choice theory. Shona Hearn, President of the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers Association, pointed out that in 1987:

the Treasury taught us the new doctrine of 'provider capture' — in other words, teacher unions (in fact teachers generally) were 'providers' who had captured the system in our own interests. Teachers' interests must inevitably be in conflict with those of students. Therefore we had to be shut out of the reform process (Hearn 1992, 74).

Public choice theory is explicit in the work of many who are most influential in Coalition policy development, and it is implicit in much of the everyday 'common sense' of Coalition members, especially those with small business backgrounds. It is a position of profound distrust of the organisations which represent professionals working in the public sector. Some professionals, such as medical doctors, who are funded through the public sector, may be protected from the harsh application of public choice theory to their sphere because of their traditional association with conservative politics and status as 'real' professionals (even if organisations such as the Australian Medical Association (AMA) are registered unions). On the other hand, teachers are disadvantaged by their traditional identification with the wider labour movement (trade unions and the Labor Party) and the fragility of their status as professionals. Public choice theory, and related assumptions, deny the social and cultural significance of collective organisation in general — well illustrated by Margaret Thatcher's comment, drawn from the methodological individualism of conservative social philosopher F A Hayek, that there is 'no such thing as society'. With public choice theory underlying so much of the new government's thinking, teacher unions will have a struggle maintaining a productive relationship with the government and countering a pattern of public discourse based implicitly on a public choice theory that is likely to further develop in the context of the Commonwealth government and many State and Territory governments of similar persuasion.

It is as yet unclear whether the Coalition's industrial relations policy, combined with similar policies in many States, will weaken the ability of the teacher unions to maintain a strong national profile and representation of the teaching profession. While the new regime may be more difficult for unions, it may strengthen their grassroots organisation and the union commitment of ordinary teachers. However, it may force the unions — federal, branch and the active membership — to devote a much higher proportion of their resources

and their creative energies to the narrowly industrial rather than the professional.

Continuing Commonwealth government funding is quite uncertain for the sort of programs which have been so supportive of the development of a more national teaching profession, such as the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning, the National Schools Network, the Australian Teaching Council, the National Professional Development Program, the Chalk Circle and many associated research and development projects. There are commitments from the government for continued support for a period for the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning and some other programs. However, new initiatives are unlikely, whatever the desire of the relevant minister, because of the government's overriding concern with cutting Commonwealth expenditure, and its desire to step back from 'centralism', to avoid 'duplication', and transfer to the States and Territories responsibilities in areas such as education taken on by the Commonwealth since the early 1970s.

In conclusion, the new Commonwealth government cannot be relied upon to support the continued strengthening of a more national teaching profession. It may provide some basic support, but it may undermine it in other ways.

There are wider developments which may support the development of a stronger national teaching profession. Most significant may be the development of national and global information technology links, and their integration into the everyday work of teachers, their unions and associations, and other organisations. The Commonwealth and the school authorities will be supporting this through Education Network Australia (EdNA).

The question remains: is the momentum sufficient for the national teaching profession to continue developing independently of governments — both Commonwealth and State or Territory? School authorities (government and non-government) continue to be in an ambivalent position: wishing to promote teacher professionalism that improves the quality of teaching and learning, but also not wanting to lose control of management prerogatives to a broader and more assertive professionalism. Clearly the most effective teacher professionalism (ultimately the most effective student learning) involves close cooperation between the profession and school authorities. However teacher professionalism must be sustained and developed outside the direct relationships between school authorities and teachers (including the industrial relationship between school authorities and teachers and their unions).

Will teachers and their organisations, teacher educators and education researchers and their organisations, parents, and others, maintain a

commitment to a national teaching profession while there are so many pressures and demands on them? The basic infrastructure, culture and commitment are now developing, but are fragile; the future is uncertain. A stronger and more effective national teaching profession requires ongoing hard work, as well as commitment. The quality of schooling in the future depends on it.

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