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TEACHER UNIONS IN VICTORIA 1982 - 1995

An examination of the policies and activities of two principle education unions within  
the Victorian State education sector during two distinct political phases

BY  
MONA RAGHDO



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## **List of Abbreviations**

AEU	Australian Education Union
AIRC	Australian Industrial Relations Commission
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ATU	Australian Teachers' Union
FTUV	Federated Teachers Union Of Victoria
GAT	General Achievement Test
IRCV	Industrial Relations Commission of Victoria
LAP	Learning Assessment Program
PRP	Professional Recognition Program
TFV	Teachers Federation of Victoria
TSA	Teaching Services Act
TTUV	Technical Teachers Union Of Victoria
VATF	Victorian Associated Teachers Federation
VBOS	Victorian Board Of Studies
VCAB	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VSTA	Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association
VTSCAC	Victorian Teaching Service Conciliation and Arbitration Commission
VTU	Victorian Teachers' Union

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Teacher unions in Australia have maintained a close, open and direct relationship with the Australian Labor Party (hereafter ALP). Whilst this has been beneficial for unions during periods of Labor governments, at other times teacher unions have struggled to achieve success or advance their members interests.

Victorian teacher unions have, since 1982, operated under two distinct phases. The first, 1982-1992, was during a period of Labor government which tended to pursue a consultative approach with the teacher unions. The second phase, 1992-1994, was a period of Liberal government. This government sought to deal directly with teachers rather than teacher unions during their reform of the state education system. This thesis examines the effects of these two governments on the objectives and strategies of the Victorian teacher unions.

### 1.2 Background

Unlike other Australian States where teachers are represented by one state-wide teachers' union, Victoria has, since the 1940s, had a system of multiple teacher unions. These unions have operated separately, dealing and negotiating on their members behalf with little regard to one another. Victorian teachers are currently represented by two major

unions. The Victorian Secondary Teachers Association (hereafter VSTA), established in 1948 and predominantly representing high school teachers; and The Federated Teachers' Union Of Victoria (hereafter FTUV), established in 1989 and representing primary school teachers, technical school teachers and Technical and Further Education (hereafter TAFE) teachers. Over the years, these two unions have experienced sectional antagonism, fragmentation and inter-union rivalry (Nash & Spaul 1986, p.29). The cost of such fragmentation has been very high in financial terms, membership support and political vulnerability. However, despite these problems, Victorian teacher unions during the 1980s found themselves at the forefront of teacher unionism in Australia in terms of influence upon government education policies. Their influence extended to the development and implementation of education policies and extensive involvement in decision making at various levels within the education system.

The election of the Cain Labor Government in 1982 brought with it a co-operative approach to industrial relations in general and within the education system in particular. This can be seen in three ways. Firstly, the Cain government involved teacher unions in decision making at various levels of the education spectrum. This included direct negotiations on the restructuring of the Education Department to enable devolution of responsibility to schools. Secondly, teacher unions were involved in extensive and direct consultation with the government on the establishment of a new industrial relations machinery based on direct negotiation, conciliation and voluntary arbitration. The unions' equal representation on the newly formed Victorian Teaching Services Conciliation Arbitration Commission, (hereafter VTSCAC), gave them significant influence over the workings of the commission and often ensured preference for the unions' stance. Thirdly,

the negotiation of legally binding staffing and conditions agreements ensured improved wages and working conditions and increases in educational resources. Overall, Victorian teacher unions had a significant impact on many aspects of the education system during the 1980s, from departmental level down to the school level. The active role of teacher unions in agenda setting and decision making was accompanied by large increases in union membership.

The election of the Liberal National coalition government in October 1992, heralded a new approach to industrial relations in the Victorian education system. Through its "Schools of the Future" policy, the Liberal National coalition government introduced major changes to State education in Victoria. This new approach involved three components. Firstly, the responsibility for running schools was devolved to school principals so that schools became self-managing. School principals are now required to establish a "School Charter" setting out the educational aims and priorities of the school. They are empowered to directly appoint staff, to monitor staff performance, recommend salary increases and promotion, prepare school budgets and allocate resources. Funds are provided directly to schools and not to central administration. This devolution of power has resulted in the shifting of educational decision making and resources management to school principals. Accordingly, principals have authority and jurisdiction over matters previously decided centrally or through consultation with local union branches. Secondly, the Liberal government introduced significant curriculum and assessment changes. Most noticeable is the increase in external assessment at the senior level, the introduction of the Learning Assessment Program at the primary level, and the General Achievement Test at year 12. These tests were introduced as means of accounting to parents for the educational

attainment of their children and the establishment of a state wide standardisation process.

As part of the curriculum changes, the Victorian Curriculum And Assessment Board (hereafter VCAB), was replaced by the Victorian Board of Studies (hereafter VBOS).

Unlike its predecessor, the VBOS has responsibility for co-ordinating school curriculum from the year prep to year 12. Overall, these changes reintroduced the centralisation of curriculum and assessment procedures across all Victorian schools. The third component of change was the introduction of the Professional Recognition Program for teachers. This program replaces the Teachers (Government Teaching Service ) Award 1990. It replaces the promotional system based on seniority with school based assessed performance. For teacher unions, the PRP has been the most controversial aspect of the Liberal National coalition government's education policy as it requires teachers to opt out of the awards system.

These changes, accompanied by a significant decrease in funding and the number of teachers employed, have resulted in a major shift in the balance of power within the education system. Victorian teacher unions are no longer regarded by the government as the legitimate representatives of teachers and accordingly, their role and influence over education has diminished significantly. This thesis seeks to explore the changing role and influence of the Victorian teacher unions during these two periods of government.

### **1.3 Research question**

Unions representing public service employees have a special relationship with governments. They will inevitably rely more on political rather than industrial campaigns

to secure gains for members (Gardner 1986, p.177). For Victorian teacher unions, gains made during the 1980s through their association with the Australian Labor Party, were rapidly lost when a non-Labor government was elected to power. The purpose of this thesis is to chart the extent of gains won and lost during this period, and to examine the role of the teacher unions under the present Liberal National coalition government. The research is guided by the hypothesis that the exclusion of Victorian teacher unions from participation in decision making has resulted in a down-grading of teachers working conditions in the Victorian state education system during the 1990s. This proposition is assessed through an examination of the ramifications of the change in government in 1992 on teacher unions and on the practices at individual schools.

Although the relationship between the ALP and trade unions in Australia is well documented, industry level research on the question of the relationship between unions and two state governments, with distinct policies, is less well researched. Hence, this thesis examines the policies and activities of the two principle education unions within the Victorian state education sector: the VSTA and the FTUV under the Labor and Liberal National coalition governments. With a combined membership of approximately 30,000 during the late 1980s, these unions covered the majority of education workers in Victoria. These two unions were the catalysts behind the significant changes to the state education system.

## **1.4 Methodology**

Much of this thesis concerns past events, and this is reflected in the methodology

employed to address the research question. A literature review examines Australian and overseas writings in relation to union aims and objectives in general, and specifically in relation to Australian education unions. This provides contextual information to understand the forces influencing unions' aims and objectives at a particular point in time. The literature on Australian teacher unions explains the breadth of issues impacting upon teacher union objectives, and the priorities accorded by their members with both industrial and professional interests and concerns. Events described in both periods under review in this thesis have been documented from a range of sources. Government education department documents, political party policy statements and newspaper reports provide the basis for exploring changed education policies. The response of unions to changes in government policy has been assessed through extensive examination of union files of election campaigns, union conferences and union industrial campaigns, as well as minutes of union executive meetings, union journals, newspapers and other publications. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a number of individuals who experienced the changes to education during the 1980s and 1990s. These included Ms. Mary Bluett, Deputy President of The Australian Education Union a number of past and present school teachers, (including union Executive members and branch delegates), and a number of school principals who have experienced the two different government policies first hand. Each of these interviewees contributed to the writer's understanding of events and the magnitude of changes documented in this thesis

## **1.5 Structure of thesis**

This thesis begins with a literature review which examines trade unions' objectives in

general and Victorian teacher unions' in particular. This provides the context for understanding the behaviour of Victorian teacher unions in the 1980s and 1990s.

Chapter 3 provides a brief history of Victorian teacher unions, and outlines the organisational characteristics and structure of the VSTA and FTUV. Key concepts of inter-union rivalry and continued fragmentation are explored and organisational characteristics of structure and government are explained. This provides a means of understanding the factors contributing to the Victorian teacher unions close involvement with the ALP in 1982. It also sets the scene for understanding how education policy in the 1990s impacted upon the unions' influence at school level.

Chapter 4 explores the role of teacher unions in Victoria during the 1980s, and begins with their decision to support the ALP during the 1982 state election campaign. An analysis of the ALP's 1982 Education policy then follows with a particular emphasis on the impact of the policy, in practical terms, on teacher unionism and teachers' working conditions in the state. The key elements in this section are identifying the gains and the influence of teacher unions during this period.

Chapter 5 is concerned with changes in state education policy and practice since the election of the Liberal National coalition government in October 1992. The Schools of the Future policy is outlined to give an understanding of the magnitude of structural, industrial and educational resource management changes implemented. An analysis of teacher unions' opposition to Schools of the Future then follows. Key aspects such as the role of the principal, school charters, school councils, the global budget and the workforce

management plan are given particular attention as they form an integral part of the Schools of the Future policy. This chapter highlights the extensive changes introduced since 1992, and the gap which developed between the government policies and the unions preferred position.

Chapter 6 focuses on three areas. Firstly the impact of Schools of the Future policy on the institutional, industrial and educational resources gains made by Victorian teacher unions during the 1980s; secondly, teacher unions opposition to the introduction of Schools of the Future program and thirdly, teacher unions' response to this major shift in state education policy. This chapter highlights the limited scope for action and power available to unions when confronted with an employer which refuses to acknowledge them as the legitimate representative of their members.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by drawing together the key points raised in the earlier chapters. It summarises the changes in union aims and objectives which occurred during the period under review and contrasts the 1980s period under a Labor government with the 1990s under a Liberal National coalition government. It identifies the factors which have both influenced and constrained the unions' aims and objectives during these periods.

## CHAPTER 2

### TRADE UNIONS AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

#### 2.1 Introduction

Trade unions have existed in Australia for over 150 years. During that time, they have developed from a small collection of mutual benefit societies to large, powerful and complex organisations with a significant place in the development and maintenance of employment relations in the 1990s. Arguably, the changes which the trade union movement in Australia have undergone over the years have also resulted in shifts from its original aims of protecting the welfare of their members, to favour issues concerning the union movement's survival and relevance in contemporary society. Consequently, there is considerable contemporary debate over trade union goals and purpose.

The first step in understanding trade unions' objectives lies in their definition. The term trade union has been used to cover a wide variety of organisations with contrasting aims, methods, strategies, traditions and structures. Early writers on trade unions, such as Sydney and Beatrice Webb, defined a trade union as "... a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives" (Webbs 1920, p.1). Whilst the purpose of contemporary trade unions may be considerably wider, the essence of the Webb definition is still applicable today.

According to Martin (1989), the single most constant defining feature of all trade unions is

that they organise employees. However the goals pursued and the way they organise and represent employees, structurally and strategically, are diverse. This view is widely shared amongst writers on trade unions such as Flanders (1970), Deery (1989), Gardner (1992), Rawson (1984) and Clarke (1977).

## **2.2 Trade unions' aims and objectives**

Martin (1989) classifies trade unions into five categories according to their purpose: the Pluralist; the Syndicalist; the Marxist/Leninist; the Authoritarian and the Organicist. Each of these categories of unions serve different goals and groups. The Pluralist view trade unions as industrial regulators (Martin 1989, p.14). The Syndicalist depict trade unions as social emancipators to replace capitalism with a system of industry unions administering production (Martin 1989, p.23). The Marxist/Leninist group serve the interests of the working class as a whole (Martin 1989, pp.38-50). The Authoritarian aim to improve production and productivity (Martin 1989, pp.70-94), whilst the Organicist serve as a moral force to promote co-operation between workers and managers (Martin 1989, p.51). After extensive discussion of these categories of trade unions' purposes, Martin concludes that the pragmatic aim of trade unions is potentially so varied that the specific goals or objectives of trade unions must be equally diverse (1989, p.99).

Although this view of diversity of goals and objectives is shared by most writers on the subject, agreement on the classifications drawn by Martin is not. Flanders (1970, p.39) claims that the Marxist view of "pure and simple" unionism is invalid as trade unions have only been able to advance by sticking doggedly to their immediate ends and refusing to be

exploited as a tool for political parties (p. 39). The Organicist view, where trade unions are seen as a kind of social police force to keep order and the wheels of industry turning, is given one answer by Flanders: "...the first and overriding responsibility of all trade unions is to the welfare of their own members, that is their primary commitment, not to a firm, not to an industry, not to the nation" (1970, p.40).

Flanders (1970) argues that a union collects its members contributions and demands their loyalty specifically for the purpose of protecting their "interests" as the members see them, not their alleged "true" or "best" interests as defined by others. Furthermore, he suggests that the principle task of trade unions must be one of representation and if they fail in this, trade unions are no longer serving their purpose. Their objectives are not those of a social police force, nor to gain power through political affiliation or revolution but to promote sectional interests of their members (Flanders 1970, p.41).

Flanders suggests that the best way to understand the purpose of trade unions is to observe their behaviour and to infer what they are from what they do (1970). This view of trade unions purpose was similarly expressed by Hoxie as early as 1919, when he suggested that to a large extent trade unions' aims, principles and policies must be inferred from their demands and methods employed (1919, p.34). Applying this principle to the United Kingdom, Flanders observed that trade unions devote most of their time to collective bargaining (1970). He then defined their objectives as to defend and improve their members terms and conditions of employment by raising wages, shortening hours of work and making working conditions safer and healthier amongst other issues. Through controlling and regulating employment relations, they limit the power and authority of

employers and lessen the dependence of employees on market fluctuations and the arbitrary will of management, thus providing protection for their members (p. 42).

Flanders further claims that in addition to providing protection, collective bargaining also serves a great social purpose of permitting participation (1970, p. 42). It is through such participation that trade unions are able to serve their members' interests. Hence Flanders concludes the two basic purposes of trade unions are job regulation and control. These enable trade unions to offer members the daily protection of industrial rights (p. 48).

In contrast, Clarke (1977) sees trade unions essentially as a political and social movement. He claims that trade unions have originated as organisations of working people dedicated to militantly representing their interests, and in some cases to transforming capitalist society (Clarke 1977, p.7). However, Clarke claims contemporary trade unions seem to have lost sight of any vision of an alternative socialist society. Instead they have become integrated into the system of capitalism. Contemporary trade unions, through collective bargaining, conciliation and compromise have come to terms with the power of capital rather than attempting to overthrow that power. Thus trade unions have naturally become oriented towards furthering the interests of their own members within the framework of capitalism rather than the interests of the whole working class through the abolition of capitalism (Clarke 1977, pp.15-18).

### **2.3 Australian trade unions**

Writers on Australian unions adopt a common theme: a diversity of union methods but

common union objectives. Rawson (1986) takes a broad view and suggests two basic competing purposes of Australian trade unions: the advancement of members' working conditions and the social transformation of capitalist society. He suggests trade unions are multi-purpose organisations intended to combine bargaining on conditions of employment role with broader objectives which extend to any aspect of society (1985, p. 14).

Although Rawson considers the protection and advancement of members' conditions of employment as the inescapable purpose of trade unions, he also views trade unions predominantly as a social movement which provides members with an instrument with which to attempt to change society. He claims that the most distinct characteristic of Australian trade unionism is the breadth of their objectives. They claim an interest in the overall structure and operation of society and are concerned with many matters which do not directly involve their members in a specific sense (Rawson 1985, p.46). Rawson also claims that trade unions must maintain and broaden their social interests in order for them to survive and remain relevant.

Deery (1989), whilst acknowledging the difficulties faced in generalising about the behaviour, activities and objectives of trade unions, takes a pragmatic approach to identifying common elements and purposes of trade unions in Australia. Deery endorses the Webbs' approach of defining trade unions as being formed by wage and salary earners for the purpose of protecting and improving the conditions of their working lives. Over the years, Australian trade unions have evolved into significant organisations with conflicting political ideologies, interests, roles and industrial tactics. Hence, to attribute a single set of goals and objectives to them is to assume a unity of purpose which is not

present. Instead, Deery (1989) identifies four principle objectives as the primary concerns of most trade unions: the provision of direct service to members; improved conditions of employment; organisational security and political objectives.

Australian trade unions provide a range of benefits to their members such as legal aid, taxation and superannuation advice, and professional and educational programs which are financed directly from union revenues. In the early stages of Australian unionism, the emphasis on the provision of non-wage benefits was as great as that placed upon advancing members' direct economic interests. As governments increasingly provided social welfare benefits, this role for unions diminished. In recent years, trade unions have returned to the provision of broader benefits but now as means of enhancing their recruitment efforts.

Undoubtedly, the dominant concern of Australian unions is to improve the economic conditions of their members through claims for higher wages, shorter hours and enhanced annual, long-service and other leave entitlements. Australian trade unions also aim to provide some form of job security for their members. They have consistently sought union security arrangements in awards and agreements such as closed-shop agreements and preference clauses for the benefit of members and organisational security. Finally trade unions have had a direct involvement in issues of a non-industrial nature which has evoked a great deal of controversy.

Although Deery (1989) classifies trade unions' objectives into four principle categories, he, like Flanders (1970) and Rawson (1986), views their major purpose as advancing the

economic interests of their members by improving their terms and conditions of employment. The methods used and the emphasis placed on achieving such goals are dependent upon a number of factors including size, structure and political orientation of the union, and to a lesser extent the timing of their action. Australian trade unions have shown a distinct preference for practical and immediate results and have been less disposed to the pursuit of goals that might seek to change the social order and bring radical political and social reforms.

In attempting to formulate a set of trade unions' aims and objectives, Gardner (1992) refers to the theories and classifications outlined by writers such as Martin (1989), Flanders (1970) and Rawson (1986), and concurs that trade unions pursue a diversity of goals and objectives in order to improve their members' interests. Their aims range from improving wages and conditions to protecting the environment. Like Deery (1989), Gardner claims the level of support for anyone of these objectives is largely dependent upon the union and its members, and upon considerations of the constraints and barriers faced by the union at the time (1986, p.172). Constraints external to the union include political, market, and management factors whilst internal factors include the membership base, union structure and union leadership (Gardner 1992, p101). These factors, according to Gardner, limit unions' strategic choice and therefore tend to influence their aims and objectives. As a consequence, trade unions will develop characteristic dominant strategies, sometimes referred to as "major preferred strategies", creating common patterns in the way these goals and objectives are achieved (1986, p.176). Of particular interest to this thesis is Gardner's proposition that: "unions with a predominantly public sector membership, or with a membership which is dependent on state funding will, almost inevitably "choose"

to undertake campaigns in the political arena” (1986, p.177). As will be shown later, Victorian teacher unions achieved major gains through campaigning at the political level in the 1980s. But equally, losses were rapidly incurred when their political influence dissipated in the 1990s.

## **2.4 Victorian teacher unions' objectives**

Research on Victorian teacher unions has been dominated by Spaul, an educationalist, and writings on teacher unions' objectives are otherwise limited. Spaul has been the leading authority on Victorian teacher unionism since the late 1960s and provides the most thorough analysis of teacher unions objectives. Spaul (1969, 1972 & 1986), in contrast to writers such as Flanders (1970) noted earlier, observes that the best way to ascertain the objectives of teacher unions is through the stated objectives in their constitutions and other written charters. He classifies teacher unions' objectives into four main categories: industrial, educational, political and institutional objectives (Spaul 1986, p.61).

Spaul (1986) suggests that industrial objectives form the basis of teacher unions in Victoria. He claims that the overriding aim of all teacher unions is the defence of the "bread and butter" issues for teachers such as salaries, superannuation and conditions of work. Accordingly, the pursuit and attainment of these objectives have produced the most frequent, and from the members point of view, most critical activities of Victorian teacher unions (Spaul 1969, p.2). Educational objectives include a fundamental desire to improve facilities within the state school system through participation, encouragement of equal distribution of resources and social benefits to both staff and students (Spaul 1969, p.3).

Political objectives attempt to strengthen the teacher unions movement in order to improve the status and rights of teachers as citizens. These tend to be expressed through rights of representation and bargaining on behalf of teachers. Institutional objectives of teacher unions relate to activities that are firstly necessary for the maintenance of the administrative functioning of the union, such as resources, support, research, welfare services and the publication of journals; and secondly provide selective benefits to those members who need such assistance. These are often expressed in the traditional form of insurance against personal misadventure such as legal assistance (Spaull 1986, p.65). Spaull (1986) claims that as a result of the incremental effects in policy making and implementation, and the changing functions of teaching and schools, Victorian teacher unions opted for a wider range of industrial and educational objectives in the 1980s compared to the 1970s and earlier (pp. 61-62).

Victorian teacher unions' objectives, according to Spaull, are no different to any other Australian trade union. Their objectives reflect the memberships' interests, demands and expectations of the education and the industrial relations system. These objectives extend beyond their industrial aims. Members have professional, social and political objectives which are often a significant feature of the struggle of their unions.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Trade unions are complex organisations with a significant place in the development of employment relations. As the main representative body of workers, trade unions can have a direct influence at both national and state levels (Gardner 1992, p.77).

Australian trade unions have formed an integral part of the Australian industrial and political scene. It is generally accepted that trade unions exist for the purpose of protecting and promoting the interests of their members as employees. As unions have developed, their aims and purposes have also expanded creating an on-going and somewhat inconclusive debate over trade union objectives. Whilst some writers view unions in predominantly instrumentalist terms, as agencies for achieving limited and immediate industrial aims, others view them as predominantly political institutions. They are vehicles of social change to which there is no limit to their legitimate concerns (Martin 1975).

Broadly, Victorian teacher unions' objectives reflect a dualism of economic and socio-political objectives. Economic objectives, concerning working conditions, have formed a major part of their activities, but educational or broader social concerns such as access to quality of education have also been an important characteristic of teacher unions' objectives. This thesis explores the way in which Victorian teacher unions sought, successfully, to achieve both economic and socio-political objectives during the 1980s. It also explores how a change in the environment can dramatically impact upon past gains and pose new constraints on methods for pursuing objectives.

## CHAPTER 3

### TEACHER UNIONS IN AUSTRALIA

#### 3.1 Introduction

Teacher unions in Australia have a tradition of high levels of union membership. By the late 1980s over 90%, or approximately 210,000 teachers belonged to teacher unions (Spaull 1992, p.12). Such a high level of membership has resulted in teacher unions forming the largest constituents of State Labour Councils and the Australian Council Of Trade Unions (Spaull 1992, p.11).

Australia has eight major state teacher unions and one federal teacher union. The largest is the New South Wales Teachers' Federation (63,000 members in 1990), and the smallest is the Northern Territory Teachers' Federation (1500 members) (Spaull 1992, p.17). Unlike other states, since the 1940s Victoria has had multiple teacher unions and, with few exceptions, those unions have operated separately, dealing and negotiating with little regard for one another. Currently Victorian teachers are represented by two unions, the VSTA and the FTUV. The former was established in 1948 and the latter in 1990. These two unions originally reflected the nature and needs of teachers in specialists schools such as technical schools and those in secondary schools whose interests could not be accommodated by the old Victorian Teachers' Union (hereafter VTU). Nowadays, they exist side by side within schools, compete for membership and have different policies, pay scales and career structures.

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#### 3.1 Introduction

Teacher unions in Australia have a tradition of high levels of union membership. By the late 1980s over 90%, or approximately 210,000 teachers belonged to teacher unions (Spaull 1992, p.12). Such a high level of membership has resulted in teacher unions forming the largest constituents of State Labour Councils and the Australian Council Of Trade Unions (Spaull 1992, p.11).

Australia has eight major state teacher unions and one federal teacher union. The largest is the New South Wales Teachers' Federation (63,000 members in 1990), and the smallest is the Northern Territory Teachers' Federation (1500 members) (Spaull 1992, p.17). Unlike other states, since the 1940s Victoria has had multiple teacher unions and, with few exceptions, those unions have operated separately, dealing and negotiating with little regard for one another. Currently Victorian teachers are represented by two unions, the VSTA and the FTUV. The former was established in 1948 and the latter in 1990. These two unions originally reflected the nature and needs of teachers in specialists schools such as technical schools and those in secondary schools whose interests could not be accommodated by the old Victorian Teachers' Union (hereafter VTU). Nowadays, they exist side by side within schools, compete for membership and have different policies, pay scales and career structures.

The Australian Education Union (hereafter AEU), formerly the Australian Teachers' Union, is the federal union with which the FTUV and the VSTA are affiliated. The AEU represents teachers and other education workers Australia-wide at the national level, and represents both state unions before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

This chapter begins with an overview of Victorian teacher unions, and then examines both unions in detail with respect to union structure, government and objectives.

### **3.2 Victorian teacher unions**

Victorian teacher unionism differs in organisational structure and political style from other teacher unions in Australia. It departs from the typical Australian model of a single state teacher union. According to Nash and Spaul (1986), the Victorian experience has been an organisational nightmare based on intense sectional antagonism, fragmentation and inter-union rivalry (Nash & Spaul 1986, p.29). This high level of fragmentation has been accredited by Nash and Spaul to three major factors. Firstly, the constant tension derived from the social and occupational character of teachers' work. Although school teaching as an occupation presents a rather homogenous image to the outside world, a great deal of division exists between men and women teachers, classroom teachers and administrators, primary and post primary teachers and country and city teachers. This, coupled with the normal tensions which exist within any large occupational group, has impeded efforts to form a unified teachers' union in Victoria. Secondly, political, ideological and religious differences amongst membership have tended to prevent unification into one union; and thirdly, Victoria's unique system of industrial relations recognised different unions' rights

for representation before the Teachers' Tribunal, thereby supporting the existence of more than one industrial organisation (Nash & Spaul 1986, pp.29-30). Although such conditions exist to a varying degree in all Australian teaching services, it is only in Victoria that such tensions have become manifest in separate union structures (Bessant & Spaul 1972).

The cost of this organisational fragmentation for Victorian teacher unions has been high. Nash and Spaul (1986) observe that one effect has been the relatively low proportion of membership compared to other teacher unions in Australia. During the mid 1980s, and prior to the formation of the FTUV, approximately 80% of Victorian government school teachers belonged to one of the then three major unions VSTA, the Technical Teachers Union of Victoria (hereafter TTUV) or the VTU (p. 31). This level of membership is high compared to other industries, but is well below the membership rates experienced by the education unions in other states. Spaul suggests the main factor contributing to this relatively low level of union membership is the inadequate organising facilities at the branch level and the constant confusion caused by the presence of two unions within schools. In addition, sectionalism has resulted in duplication of resources and political vulnerability. According to Nash and Spaul (1986), low membership rates was an impetus to reforming the three Victorian teacher unions in the 1980s.

The balance of power within Victorian teacher unions is distributed between the elected leadership and a minority of activists at other levels of the hierarchy and branches (Spaul 1992, p.17). Although the government of Victoria's two major teacher unions varies in details, they both have a common pattern. Rank-and-file members participate in the union

at the school level, which is the local branch of the union. The responsibility for decision making on major policy issues is delegated to an annual conference, and administration and policy implementation to a monthly council meeting.

### **3.3 The Federated Teachers' Union of Victoria**

The FTUV is currently Victoria's largest education union. Formed in 1990 following the merger of the TTUV and the VTU, it represents over 20,000 primary, secondary and TAFE teachers, principles, emergency, unemployed and student teachers and school support staff (FTUV 1994, p.3). The merger of the two unions was in part a response to the government's education policy of converting all secondary schools into secondary colleges, thereby eliminating the TTUV's membership base. It was also a means of increasing their industrial influence. In 1990, when first established, the FTUV represented over 33,000 members.

#### **3.3a) FTUV structure**

The FTUV is divided into three sectors. The Primary Sector consists mainly of former members of the VTU; the Secondary Sector comprises former members of the TTUV; and the TAFE Sector consists of members associated with the TAFE teaching service of Victoria. Each of these sectors is then divided into regions, sub-regions, clusters and branches.

Regions are divided according to the boundaries set out by the Education Department with

seven regions presently recognised across the state. Each region has a number of sub-regions which implement policies and make recommendations to the State Council, the Executive and the Sector Councils. Clusters are established in common geographical areas, and have similar powers and responsibilities as sub-regions. Within clusters, branches of the union are formed at schools, institutions or workplaces where five or more members can meet. Each branch has a locally elected executive consisting of a President, a Secretary and a Treasurer.

### **3.3b) FTUV government**

The FTUV decision making occurs at Conference, State Council, Sector Councils, Executive, Regions, Sub-Regions and Clusters levels, with the annual Conference being the supreme policy making body. It comprises members of the State Council, the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary and delegates from across the state elected through sub-regions. It has management and control of the affairs of the union and the power to direct all other decision making bodies in the union and any officer, member or employee of the union.

The State Council comprises councillors of all Sectors elected on a proportional basis. It meets monthly and considers issues common to all members such as campaign strategies and award content. It has the power to conduct and manage the affairs of the union when the conference is not in session. The Council has all the power of the conference other than the power to make, add, amend, rescind or otherwise alter conference rules. At a level below, Sector Councils, (Primary; Secondary and TAFE), directly elected by Sector

membership, meet monthly to deal with matters specific to their sector.

The executive includes the president and other office bearers directly elected by the membership, and councillors elected by their Sector Councils. The Executive meets three or four times per month and is responsible for the conduct of the union between Council meetings.

The FTUV has special organisational problems due to the diversity of its membership base, and this is reflected in the complexity of their decision making structure. Members tend to differ in their training and employment background, and educational and industrial outlook. Further difficulties arise from the TAFE branches, where, unlike secondary school teachers, TAFE teachers are not employed by the State Education Department. The FTUV has attempted to cater for this diversity of membership by ensuring TAFE teachers exist as a separate autonomous organisation within the FTUV, and by encouraging a degree of autonomy at all branch levels, providing any proposed action is consistent with the union's overall policy and objectives.

### **3.4 The Victorian Secondary Teachers Association**

The VSTA was formed in 1948 when women, following considerable debate on the policy of equal pay for equal qualifications for teachers in primary and secondary schools, were admitted to the Victorian Secondary Masters Professional Association which had split from the VTU in 1947. The name was subsequently changed to the VSTA. In 1992, the VSTA represented 14,000 Victorian secondary school teachers, student and emergency

teachers and school support staff (Bassett 1995, p.213). Up until the mid 1980s, when the traditional division between high schools and technical schools was abandoned, VSTA members were generally high school teachers.

### **3.4a) VSTA structure**

Unlike the FTUV, the VSTA is organised through three divisions: Regions, Groups and Branches. This simpler organisational structure reflects the less diverse membership base of the VSTA. Regions are determined according to boundaries defined by the Department of Education. The number of representatives in each region is not fixed but is dependent upon the annual total number of VSTA members. Groups consist of members drawn from not less than three secondary schools in any district. Each group determines its own rules in accordance with the constitution. The Branch, existing at each school, is the basis of membership recruitment. Each branch determines its own local rules subject to guidelines set out in the constitution.

### **3.4b) VSTA government**

Like the FTUV, the government of the union resides with the annual General Conference. The Conference deals with such matters as the formulation of the log of claims and union strategies. Between general conferences, the governance of the union is delegated to the Council, although decisions of the Council may be overruled by a simple majority at the following Conference. The Council consists of the President, the Deputy President, the Treasurer and representatives elected from the regions. It has the primary responsibility of

keeping branches well informed of changes in union policies and action. The Executive consists of senior officers elected for two or three years dependent upon position.

### **3.5 Objectives of VSTA and FTUV**

As noted by Spaul (1986), the written objectives of teacher unions in Victoria have remained relatively unchanged over time. These objectives, according to Spaul, reveal in part the purpose of the organisation and the direction of its aims. Victorian teacher unions' objectives, as stated in their respective constitutions, concern industrial, educational, political and institutional objectives. Both the VSTA and the FTUV state that the overriding aim of their union is to improve the working conditions and interests of their members. These interests are typically expressed in conjunction with educational objectives. VSTA objectives include generally worded statements such as "to improve Secondary Education in Victoria", (Clause 2.1). The FTUV (Clauses 2.7, 2.8, 2.9) is more specific. It emphasises areas such as the protection of the state system of education (2.7), to secure participation and influence of members in the administration, development and planning of education (2.8), and the general improvement of educational and social benefits of education (2.9). These aims are much more comprehensive than those of the VSTA. The breadth of the FTUV's aims may in part explain their more militant approach during industrial campaigns.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Victorian teachers have continually been represented by a system of multiple teacher

unions and are currently represented by the VSTA and the FTUV. These unions exist side by side within schools, have different policies and compete for membership. Both unions have similar organisational characteristics and structures which allow and encourage participation by members at the school level. The importance of the school level is acknowledged in the structure of both unions. Schools are separate branches of the unions within ranging degrees of local authority.

Despite the rivalry between the two unions and the different membership base, Victorian teacher unions' aims and objectives are similar in character. These include industrial, educational, political and institutional objectives. Both the VSTA and the FTUV state that their overriding aim is to improve the working conditions of their members. However, the FTUV's objectives extend to include a range of educational and representative aims not explicitly embraced by the VSTA.

Chapter four documents how Victorian teacher unions sought to achieve their objectives in the 1980s under a state Labor government. The following chapters then highlight the vulnerability of union gains dependent upon the goodwill of the employer when that employer is also the government.

## CHAPTER 4

### VICTORIAN TEACHER UNIONS IN THE 1980s

#### 4.1 Introduction

Improvements in the terms and conditions of employment have always been the major aim of Victorian teacher unions. In the 1980s however, a new approach to achieving this objective was adopted. Teacher unions' activities became far more militant and politically orientated than traditionally practiced. This chapter provides a brief account of events in education industrial relations prior to the 1982 state election and the actions of teacher unions during the election campaign. The teacher unions' role in that campaign, according to union and educational observers, were to make teacher unions in Victoria one of the most powerful pressure groups for almost a decade (Bluett, M., Spaul, A., Mann, S). An analysis of these actions provides an insight into teacher unions' ability to achieve their industrial aims and the extent to which they were prepared to go in pursuit of their demands. A more detailed analysis of industrial and political gains made by the unions under the Labor government in the 1980s then follows. These gains give a clear indication of the extensive influence of unions over the education policies of the Labor government. This analysis provides the basis for later comparison with changes following the election of the Liberal National coalition government in 1992.

## 4.2 Teacher unions and the ALP election campaign 1982

The scope of teacher unions' policies and objectives widened extensively during the 1980s reflecting the full breadth of their written constitutional objectives. Although the unions are not affiliated with the ALP, in the 1980s their support for the ALP became extensive and overtly political. Their influence and involvement extended to policy formulation, implementation and participation at the various levels of the education system.

Why did Victorian teacher unions adopt a political position in the 1982 campaign? Prior to the 1982 state election campaign, teacher unions had refrained from supporting political organisations so as not to offend the rank-and-file, many of whom voted for other political parties. The exception to this was in 1945 when the VTU helped to defeat a conservative government in order to secure the introduction of the Teachers' Tribunal (Bessant 1977, p.260). In 1982, Victorian teacher unions would help defeat another conservative government to abolish that same tribunal. However, the teacher unions' role in the 1982 election differed from that of 1945 in that for the first time teacher unions publicly endorsed the ALP. A contributing factor to this major shift in teacher unions' strategy lies in their unsuccessful industrial campaigns to persuade the existing government to modify the mechanisms determining teachers' terms and conditions of employment.

The 1970s were characterised by teacher unrest in Victoria as unions sought reforms to the Victorian Teachers' Tribunal and called for direct negotiations on terms and conditions of employment. As the government was unwilling to negotiate the desired reforms, teacher unions began a prolonged period of industrial unrest. By 1980 teachers strikes were

entrenched in Victoria's education system. Of the 112 major teachers strikes in Australia between 1965 and 1981, 74 occurred in Victoria (Spaull & Mann 1985, p.22). A general increase in teacher militancy and the lack of effective handling of education disputes further contributed to the high level of disputes (Nash & Spaull 1986, p.36). In response to the unions' demands, the government introduced heavy sanctions and replaced the minister for Education Mr. Lindsay Thompson with Allan Hunt who promised to tackle the problems of education. A subsequent seminar on industrial relations in education, commissioned by the government, recommended major reforms. One outcome was the establishment of a working party, consisting of principal parties in the education system including teacher unions, whose purpose was to investigate industrial relations problems and reforms within the teaching service. The working party presented its report in May 1981 (the Hince Report 1981). The report's major recommendations included the establishment of a new industrial relations machinery and direct negotiations with teacher unions (Nash & Spaull 1986, p.43).

The unions supported these recommendations and took industrial action to pressure the government to adopt them, but the government refused to translate them into legislation. As sanctions and stand-down legislation were introduced, the unions sought a political solution through electoral intervention. As a first step, the VTU canvassed the government and the ALP on a list of specific policies related to education and industrial relations in education. The government refused to endorse the union's demands, whilst the ALP returned an almost identical list in the form of its Education policy. This response was the basis upon which support for the ALP was established. The subsequent annual conferences of the VTU, VSTA and TTUV all passed a motion to support the ALP

in their electoral campaign. All three unions stated that the basis for this support flowed from the government's refusal to implement reform and to negotiate on the question of Limited Tenure Employment and other working conditions (Spaull & Mann 1985, p.32).

Teacher unions' support for the ALP was extensive and public. It came in the form of both financial and administrative assistance. The unions contributed \$170,000 to the ALP election campaign of which \$100,000 came from the VTU's sale of assets in a local radio station. Printing, clerical and research facilities were also provided and several regional organisers were assigned to assist the campaign on behalf of ALP candidates in marginal seats (VTU State Election file 1982). In two outer Melbourne electoral seats, fully staffed VTU campaign offices were operating six months prior to the election.

Overall, the level and type of support, especially from the VTU, traditionally the least militant of the three unions, was the most systematically organised attempt in Victorian state politics to bring an educational reform campaign before the electorate. Observers have argued that the influence of the teacher unions' campaign on the election result is difficult to assess as the ALP was expected to win office in any case. However, statistics show that in key "education" seats the swing to the ALP was generally greater (Spaull 1986). The election result was deemed an outstanding success by the unions' leadership whilst the newly elected Labor government publicly acknowledged their support. As twenty former teachers joined the ALP Caucus, the government began its planned reform of the education system (Spaull & Mann 1985, p.32). A series of decisions were quickly implemented. These included the granting of substantial salary increases, the repeal of stand-down and other penal legislation against the unions and abolition of the Limited

Tenure Contracts and corporal punishment for students. Hence began one of the most prosperous decades for teacher unions in Victoria.

### **4.3 Gains made under the Labor government in the 1980s**

The 1982 ALP Education policy included most of the teacher unions' demands expressed prior to the election. The education policy involved three major themes of structural change, industrial relations machinery and educational resources issues. It committed the Labor government to continual consultation with unions, both directly and through representation on the various Boards, Regions and Committees. It also introduced the long sought after industrial relations process of direct negotiations. This policy was to set the trend on educational matters for the rest of the 1980s. Each of these three areas of change had a marked impact on teachers' working conditions and participation in education decisions.

#### **4.3a) Structural changes**

The structural changes involved the introduction of devolved responsibility from the government to school level, and the active participation in the education system of parents, teachers and the wider community. These changes stemmed from the need to democratise decision-making. Parent and teacher participation was to be facilitated and encouraged at all levels and the role of the school in determining the form of educational activities was to be greatly enhanced.

The restructuring of the Education Department involved the extension and redefinition of the roles of School Councils and Regional Boards, and the establishment of a State Board of Education. Regional offices had been established and Regional directors appointed over a decade earlier (Nash & Spaul 1986, p.50). Under the Labor government, however, their function was transformed from the administration of centrally made decisions, to a service resource link between schools and the central education administration. The three elements of the new structure are outlined below.

#### **i) State Board of Education**

Major changes to the central operation of the Education Department were introduced. A single Minister for Education was made responsible for the co-ordination and operation of the entire education system, and a State Board of Education established. This State Board was a representative body of expert teachers and administrators, from both within and outside the government's education section. Its main responsibilities were to advise the Minister, supplementing departmental advice, and to enquire into, and report upon, the needs of primary and secondary schools.

#### **ii) Regional level**

The role of the Region was changed considerably in line with devolution of power to the school community. The number of Regions were increased from 12 to 18. Board members were elected representatives of local parents, teachers and principals. The Regional Board was responsible for:

- Selecting the Board Director
- Collecting and publishing data on the Region's resources
- Regional Education Centers
- Regional school building programs
- Co-ordinating regional and group programs
- Development of Special Support Services
- Negotiating with central operation on the allocation of special resources

(ALP Education Policy 1982).

### **iii) The school council**

The Labor government believed that the school community could best determine the overall education policy for their school. Hence, school councils were to become democratically elected bodies representing parents, teachers and the wider community.

They were given responsibility for determining staffing patterns, especially in areas of special needs such as literacy, numeracy and integration, and the supervision of facilities at schools.

The changed composition and increased responsibility and jurisdiction of school councils, and the establishment of various consultative committees at schools, proved to be most advantageous to teacher unions. With 80% of teachers belonging to the unions, teacher participation invariably involved union participation notwithstanding the absence of positions specific for union representatives. Teacher unions' representation gave the unions real and direct influence at the school level where many of the decisions concerning staffing and budget spending were made. The change in the overall structure of the Education Department also gave teacher unions the opportunity to participate in the various operations of the department thereby cementing their influence over policies and

policy implementation.

#### **4.3b) Industrial relations institutions**

The Labor government introduced changes to industrial relations institutions in accordance with the recommendations of the Hince working party of 1981 through the Teaching Services Act 1983 (hereafter TSA). The Act abolished the Teachers' Tribunal and established the VTSCAC. This commission differed significantly from the Teachers' Tribunal in structure and role. Unlike the Tribunal which consisted of three members, two government representatives and one union representative, the VTSCAC consisted of five commissioners. Importantly, two of the commissioners were nominated by the unions, two were government appointees with an Education Department background, and the fifth was determined through consultation between unions and the minister. The unions' nominees were mostly former union officials (e.g. Mr. Rootsey former president of the VTU).

The role of the VTSCAC was to facilitate the process of direct negotiations, conciliation and voluntary arbitration, rather than merely implement government policies on education as had been the case with the Teachers' Tribunal. The Commission also had the power to register agreements reached between teacher unions and the government, resulting in the agreements being legally binding. This new structure potentially had significant advantages over the old arrangements. It forced the Education Department to become directly accountable as an employer in its dealings with teacher unions, it provided procedures for salary determination and it established machinery to settle grievances and

disputes (Nash & Spaul 1986, p.43). This was a significant step forward for teacher unions as registration under the commission gave them the security of legally binding agreements with the government. This contrasts with the 1970s when the Liberal government often reneged on agreements and the Teachers' Tribunal was often reluctant to translate recommendations into agreements, such as those of the Hince working party 1981.

Notwithstanding strong government and union support for the VTSCAC, it was dogged throughout much of its life by challenges to its authority by the Victorian Associated Teachers' Federation (hereafter VATF). This was a minority body formed by teachers opposed to the unions' electoral campaign of 1982. The continued hostility of the VATF appears to have stemmed from the Commission's decision to consider, for the purposes of industrial relations processes, all officers and employees of the teaching service as one unit. Industrial relations was to be conducted on a one industry one union basis. The three other unions, the VSTA, TTUV and VTU, responded by forming the Teachers' Federation of Victoria (hereafter TFV). The VATF however, refused to accept the one agent system. Instead, they mounted legal challenges against the Commission's authority which ultimately resulted in the collapse of the VTSCAC in 1987, and the shifting of industrial regulation for teachers into the jurisdiction of the Industrial Relations Commission of Victoria (hereafter IRCV).

The TFV objected to placing teachers under the IRCV's jurisdiction because arbitration would shift from voluntary to compulsory. In addition, the IRCV decided that there should be two boards, one for principals, deputy principals and vice principals, and

another for all other teachers. This could impact negatively on the TFV's ability to maintain control and influence over industrial matters through lack of representation on the principals' board, and thereby over educational decisions in general. However, following hearings in 1989 in the Supreme court, the TFV was granted all three employee seats on the teachers board and one on the principals' board (Basset 1994, p.175).

During the 1980s, despite the uncertainties over the VTSCAC's authority, the government allowed the VTSCAC to register agreements on a union by union basis. This further enhanced the three unions influence and industrial strength through the government's recognition of them as the sole representatives of teachers during negotiations.

#### **4.3c) Educational resources**

The ALP's educational resources policy was diverse and extensive. It included issues such as staffing, working conditions, equal opportunity, curriculum development, support services, and building and maintenance. Many of these issues had been discussed with teacher unions and agreed upon during the policy formulation stages.

The issue of staffing according to needs had become a major source of antagonism between the previous government and the teacher unions. The Labor government proposed a system based on established and particular needs of each school as the fairest and most sensible way of allocating staff. Each school, in addition to its basic staffing requirements, could seek extra staff for educational programs geared to meet local needs. New support services were to include Curriculum Services units, Counselling, Guidance

and Clinical Services centers, Special Education units and Curriculum Consultants, to be determined by school councils in conjunction with Regional Boards. Equal access to education was strongly supported with positive discrimination towards schools most in need when allocating funds. The most significant changes in educational resources, especially in terms of direct impact at the school level, occurred in the areas of staffing and conditions. These changes were negotiated and included in registered agreements between the unions and the government.

#### **4.4 Collective agreements**

Signed written agreements were not completed until 1983. However, Staffing and Conditions agreements merely formalised understandings and ad hoc arrangements which occurred in schools after the election of the Labor government. These procedures had been agreed to by the Minister of Education as an interim measure whilst detailed negotiations took place.

The staffing and conditions agreements, initially negotiated annually but then extended to over 3 years, were separate from salary agreements. They were negotiated individually by the three unions with the Minister for Education and the Department of Education. Unlike under the former government, these agreements were usually reached without resort to industrial action. The agreements included issues such as staffing levels, specialist staffing, teacher aides, administration and planning time, release from face-to-face teaching, class sizes, time allowances, emergency and relieving teachers and grievance procedures. The agreements reached by the three unions covered similar issues but varied

slightly with respect to staff allocation, as each union negotiated conditions appropriate for their members' specific needs.

The first of the agreements for state secondary high schools was signed in 1983. This agreement set the basis for later agreements in which only minor changes were implemented. The issues of staffing and class sizes were often the only stumbling blocks during negotiations and the only issues to cause industrial unrest or threats of industrial action.

#### **4.5 1983 VSTA agreement**

##### **a) Staffing**

The 1983 VSTA agreement provided for staff to be allocated according to a modified Base Formula calculated on the number of enrolled students and "special needs" ( e.g. integration, numeracy and ESL). The ratio of the base formula was increased from 1:21 to 1:18, and the introduction of the "special needs" category gave schools the opportunity to seek extra staff. Teacher unions had been influential in setting the ratio for the base formula, but their influence was most pronounced in the area of special needs. Special needs were decided by individual school Administrative Committees and endorsed by the school council on which unions were heavily represented. These two formulae typically resulted in an increase in the number of teachers allocated to schools.

## **b) Consultation and Committees**

The 1983 VSTA agreement provided for the establishment of an "Agreement Implementation Committee" consisting of four persons, two nominated by the unions and two by the Education Department. The committee's main function was to monitor the application of the agreement at the school level, make recommendations to the Education Department on the allocation of special needs, consider transfer issues and the distribution of curriculum imbalance, and resolve grievances arising from the implementation of the agreement.

At the school level, the agreement provided for the establishment of "Representative Committees", (section 10), which consisted of the Principal, the Deputy Principal and up to eight teachers elected from the school staff. These generally took the form of an Administrative Committee to assist principals in determining such issues as allotment, staffing and class sizes; and a Curriculum Committee to assist the principal in educational and curriculum matters.

Teacher unions representation on these committees was significant for three reasons. Firstly, the number of elected staff representatives could be reduced in favour of teachers nominated by various groups such as the principal and the VSTA branch; secondly, teacher unions were rapidly increasing their membership and thus their representation on the various committees was virtually inevitable; and thirdly, local union branches were encouraged by the unions' central administration to stand a union ticket as staff representatives. Combined, these factors ensured substantial representation of union

members, union views and thereby influence, at the various levels of decision making within schools. The introduction of these Committees into decision making processes at the school level set the basis for a new consultative approach to educational and administrative decision making both at the school level and at the policy and central departmental levels.

### **c) Class sizes and hours of work**

The 1983 VSTA agreement established new standards in teacher student ratios. Class sizes were set at a maximum of 25 students with a tolerance factor of 2, compared to former class sizes of 30 and above. Prior to this agreement, teachers were required to be on duty for a minimum of 22 hours per week with no maximum being stipulated (Education Department Victoria, General Instructions No. 1980/1). Under this agreement, 18 hours of duty per week was set as the maximum face to face teaching. Time allowance for administrative tasks such as Year Level Co-ordination and Heads of Departments was another significant gain. This was to be decided following negotiations with the local union branch and local committees, having regard to student enrolment numbers.

### **d) Wage agreements**

Substantial wage gains were achieved in the first year of the newly elected government. In addition to an 11% increase granted by the Teachers' Tribunal prior to its demise, increases of 6.2% in July 1982 and 4.9% in November 1982 were successfully negotiated directly with the Minister of Education and the unions (Basset 1994, p.156). Between

1983 and 1989 salaries were governed largely by the Accord process. In 1989, a new career restructuring scale dominated industrial relations between teacher unions and the government.

#### **4.6 Later agreements**

Negotiations on the 1984 agreement did not proceed as smoothly as those of 1983. Nevertheless, notwithstanding pending budgetary cuts, the government agreed to union demands following threats of industrial action.

The 1984 staffing and conditions agreement guaranteed the maintenance of staffing numbers despite a 2% overall government budget cut, and provided for a slight reduction in class sizes. It improved the participation and consultation sections of the 1983 agreement by allowing the establishment of other school committees as required, and included the representation of new groups of teachers such as careers teachers, librarians and pupil welfare co-ordinators.

The 1985 agreement followed a similar pattern. Negotiations were intense and resulted in the staffing formula being reduced so that class sizes could only be more than 25 with VSTA agreement. Other aspects of the 1984 agreement remained essentially unchanged. However, the VSTA continued to be involved in a myriad of negotiations and working parties within the Education Department (Henderson 1985). These led to later agreements on issues such as family leave, and a memorandum of understanding covering part-time employment and optional retirement.

The principles of staffing and conditions established in the early 1980s remained intact for the remainder of the decade. By 1989 joint agreements covering all post-primary schools were established. This form of industrial stability enabled teacher unions to concentrate their resources into other areas of membership concern such as curriculum development, (e.g. The Victorian Certificate of Education), and the development and implementation of a new career path.

#### **4.7 Career restructuring**

The establishment of a new career system in the teaching service dominated negotiations between teacher unions and the government during the late 1980s. Although negotiations began in 1986, full agreement on career restructuring was not reached until 1991. Significant differences between the two parties on the principles of a new career structure contributed to protracted negotiations. Compounding this was the increasing pressure on the government to reduce spending. Teacher unions however were determined to affect major changes to their pay scale. Subsequently, teacher unions embarked on a wages campaign to be implemented if agreement was not reached by October 26, 1989 (Bassett 1994, p.179).

The first in-principle agreement on career restructuring was reached in 1989 between the new Minister for Education, Joan Kirner, and the three teacher unions. Under this agreement, changes were to be implemented in two stages. The first provided for the extension of the automatic incremental salary scale and the replacement of the senior teacher class with a new category based on allowances to be known as "Advanced Skills

Teacher 1, 2 or 3". The second stage established the framework for review under award restructuring (Basset 1994, p.178). Benefits resulting from this agreement included \$1000 wage increase for almost 9000 post primary teachers through the extended salary scale, additional allowances for 1500 teachers, and a new salary scale for principals.

This agreement went before the IRCV for approval in August 1989. Although the IRCV approved most parts of the agreement, it deferred implementation until award restructuring was completed. Further negotiations with the government failed to resolve the situation. The AIRC's decision in the National Wage Case in August 1989, which provided for two wage increases within a six months period, complicated matters for the state government which was facing increasing pressure to cut its spending. Subsequently, and in light of the AIRC's decision, the government withdrew some of its promised allowances at the secondary level and attempted to trade conditions for wage increases. Teacher unions responded by initiating a work-to-rule campaign. Teachers restricted their work to the terms and conditions of the current staffing and conditions agreement and refused to undertake any voluntary activities such as camps and sports supervision. They also used the Victorian Certificate of Education (hereafter VCE), an issue very close to the heart of the education minister, as their major bargaining weapon by withdrawing support for its implementation. All involvement in VCE implementation committees, assessment boards and district provisions was abandoned. This seriously threatened the implementation of the phase two VCE studies which was already behind schedule. The escalation of the industrial campaign took its toll on a then politically vulnerable government and on the 19th March 1991 an agreement was finally reached (Basset 1994, p.180).

The 1991 Victorian agreement was the first complete award restructuring package for government school teachers in Australia. It introduced an additional incremental scale for all teachers, committed the state government to paying national benchmark salaries for teachers, introduced "Advanced Skills Teachers" allowances and incorporated affirmative action initiatives (Basset 1994, pp.180-181).

#### **4.8 1983 TTUV agreement**

The TTUV's technical division agreement of 1983 was relatively more comprehensive than the VSTA's agreement in part due to the complex nature of technical schools. Like the VSTA's agreement, the TTUV's 1983 agreement covered such issues as teacher replacement, recruitment and transfers and participation and consultation at the school level, as well as hours of work, class sizes and staffing.

##### **a) Staffing and class sizes**

A complex formula was introduced to allocate staff according to school curriculum, special needs and student ratio considerations. A base number of teachers was calculated on the number of students, with special needs additional to this. A Curriculum Imbalance Factor, consisting of teachers in subject areas with a statewide oversupply, was incorporated. In 1983, there was a curriculum imbalance factor of over 200 teachers to which schools were entitled to be considered for an allocation over and above their base entitlement. In addition, a staffing imbalance factor consisting of any teacher in a school not within the previous three categories was included in the formula. These teachers could

be used to enhance programs and develop new initiatives.

In practical terms, the new staffing formula resulted in a significant drop in the staff-student ratio at technical schools (1:14), and in an increase in the number of technical schools teachers from 6176 to 6376 (excluding special needs). The maximum number of face-to-face teaching hours was set at eighteen and a half per week. Other duties such as yard duty supervision and pastoral care were set at a maximum of three and a half hours per week and extras were limited to a maximum of two per fortnight. Class sizes at technical schools were set at no more than 20 with no tolerance factor. This was significantly lower than the VSTA's, reflecting the practical nature of classes at technical schools. Significantly, the revised staffing formula at technical schools resulted in a substantial increase in the number of teachers employed, and gave the TTUV the opportunity to participate and influence the allocation of staffing to the various schools through various committees.

#### **b) Consultation and Committees**

The TTUV's 1983 agreement included consultation at the school level along similar lines to the VSTA agreement. The central union administration recommended the establishment of a Local Administrative Committee to assist the principal in determining allotments, class sizes and staffing allocation and a Curriculum Committee to assist the principal in matters of educational and curriculum nature.

#### **4.9 State award**

During the 1980s, teacher unions in Victoria did not seek registration of their conditions and staffing agreements as a State award. These agreements operated successfully without such registration and doubt existed as to whether all agreed issues could be included in a State award. The Labor government's continued political success also made such registration appear less necessary. However, following the 1989 state election in which the Labor government held power by a one seat majority, and the increasingly protracted negotiations between the teacher unions and the government, the unions sought to register their staffing and conditions agreements as a State award.

The Teachers (Government Teaching Service) Award came into effect in January 1990. It covered all matters concerning working conditions for both primary and secondary teachers, as per the staffing and conditions agreements, with the exception of class sizes. Class sizes were excluded from the award because the IRCV considered them a management prerogative (Bluett, 1996).

#### **4.10 Federal award**

School teachers had traditionally been excluded from the jurisdiction of the AIRC. In January 1984 however, following the Commonwealth Youth Support Scheme Officers Case (1983), The Australian Teachers Union, (hereafter ATU), was formed to seek access to the Federal industrial relations system for state school teachers. The three Victorian unions, the VTU, VSTA and TTUV affiliated with the ATU. With successful negotiation

and implementation of staffing and conditions agreements already existing, the Victorian unions did not see a need for a Federal award during the 1980s. Nevertheless, the significance of Federal registration was not lost on union officials such as Brian Henderson, president of the VSTA, who remarked "...federal registration will become increasingly important in the next decade..."(Henderson 1990). As will be shown in the next chapter Federal award became essential in the 1990s.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

In its 1982 Education policy, the ALP gave a clear commitment to teacher unions on a wide range of teacher unions' objectives, both educational and industrial. The VTU president, in his address to the council prior to the 1985 state election, commented that the ALP's fulfilment of election commitments was "a pretty impressive record of delivery on promises..." (VTU Journal 1985, February). A close examination of the ALP's education policy during its first term in office tends to confirm this.

A major component of the ALP's election platform had been an undertaking to consult effectively with educational interest groups. This was achieved through the decentralisation of decision making and the devolution of authority to schools. Teacher unions were also drawn into an elaborate network of consultation and negotiation such as their involvement in negotiations on Education Department budget proposals and career structures (Nash & Spaul 1986, p.47). Teacher unions also had representatives on bodies ranging from the State Board of Education to school councils as well as committees, selection panels and advisory bodies.

As for staffing and conditions, the most significant achievement concerned teacher numbers. In a period of declining student enrolment, teacher unions kept the government to its promise to maintain primary school teacher numbers and avoid redundancies. This resulted in the retention of 1800 primary teaching positions which would otherwise have been lost (Nash & Spaul 1986, p.49). The unions were also able to achieve a reduction in class sizes, hours of work and salary increases.

Other union initiatives implemented by the Labor government included equal opportunity for teachers and students, an action plan for women, and affirmative action strategies such as the seven year leave and permanent part-time employment. These were negotiated and implemented through industrial agreements.

The fulfilment of the broad teacher unions' objectives early in the 1980s encouraged Victorian teacher unions to pursue significant curriculum and structural reforms of the education system throughout much of the 1980s. One of the most significant of these changes was to end the proliferation of alternative end of school certificates through the introduction of the VCE, a single and uniform end of school certificate across the state (Rea 1992, p.157).

Overall, the Labor government, through partnership between parents, teachers and the wider community was able to restore trust and confidence in the state education system. The education budget was increased by more than \$750 million from 1982 to 1985, notwithstanding a 2% cut in funding across the board for other areas. The number of staffing, both teaching and non-teaching, increased whilst a drop in class sizes was

achieved (ALP Education election platform 1985). The Labor government brought a swift end to industrial strife by consulting teachers and unions on decisions affecting them and through the introduction of a new industrial relations system.

From the unions' point of view, the 1980s saw their influence and involvement in the various facets of the education system reach an unprecedented high. They made substantial gains in the conditions and staffing arena and their involvement and influence extended to curriculum planning and development, staff selection, (including Principals), educational initiatives, the restructuring of decision making, and the provision of advice to the Department through central and regional representation. Unions achieved the majority of their objectives, silencing member critics who were opposed to the teacher unions' decision to support the ALP in 1982. As chapter five explains, however, these gains were relatively short lived. The election of a non-Labor government in the early 1990s not only undermined the process by which unions exercised power at the school level, but also showed the unions' industrial strength to be extremely limited in the face of intransigent government refusal to acknowledge their legitimate role.

## **CHAPTER 5**

# **TEACHER UNIONS AND THE LIBERAL NATIONAL COALITION GOVERNMENT**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Victorian teacher unions played a key role in public education policy during the 1980s. Improved working conditions, binding industrial agreements and awards, joint consultation and co-operation with the government and relative industrial harmony resulted. In March 1992 however, the Liberal National coalition won office in a landslide gaining a 27 seat majority in Parliament. Teacher unions, with their close relationship with the ALP, and their inability to enter into meaningful discussions with the Liberal National coalition on state education policy in the months leading up to the election, were arguably set to lose more than most unions in the state of Victoria.

In this chapter, the Schools of the Future policy will be outlined highlighting the changes occurring in schools as a result of the new government's education policy. Structural, educational and resources management, and industrial changes will be examined. Key factors such as staff/student ratio, number of teachers, role of school councils, and staffing entitlement will be considered. A constant theme underlying these changes is the absence of union involvement in the processes and in the new school governmental structure.

## 5.2 State industrial relations context

The Liberal National coalition government introduced sweeping changes to the industrial relations system in Victoria, and especially with respect to public sector employees. Firstly, the education award and agreements were eventually abolished and replaced by individual contracts negotiated at the school level. Secondly, the Public Sector Management Act 1992 gave the state power to make decisions about public sector employment conditions without consulting relevant unions, or having the conditions subjected to the scrutiny of the Employee Relations Commission. This put an end to what teacher unions described as the "educational partnership between the government and teacher unions" (AEU News 1995, December 8). Thirdly, the Public Sector (Unions Fees) Act 1992, which ended the government deducting union membership fees from public sector employees' salaries, resulted in the VSTA's membership falling from 14,500 to less than 4000 (Basset 1994, p.198), and the FTUV's membership from 20,000 to 9000 (FTUV, 1994). Fourthly, under the Vital State Industries Act "... any industrial, commercial, farming or public or welfare service activity and any undertaking ...." may be defined by the Governor in Council to be a vital industry. The Act enables fines of up to \$250,000 to be imposed upon unions involved in industrial action and provides for individual liability. It does not, however, specify preconditions for such a declaration and thus does not limit the circumstances under which it could be applied. This has greatly restricted teacher unions' ability to respond to proposed changes with industrial action due to concern that education may be defined as a vital industry under the public or welfare service activity category of this Act.

### **5.3 The Liberal National coalition education policy**

The 1992 Liberal National coalition education policy was developed without input from education unions and consisted of a set of philosophical statements on education. It revealed little of the extent of proposed changes in public education which were to eventuate. Concepts such as high quality education and learning, choice, empowerment of the community, greater accountability and monitoring of performance were all key aspects of the policy statement (Liberal National Coalition 1992). But, the policy provided little information on how these concepts were to be translated into practice. The only clearly identified theme was the intention to decentralise the Education Department and to devolve power to schools. The introduction of these changes under the policy of "Schools of the Future", has seen a return to continued industrial unrest, confrontation and conflict reminiscent of relations between Victorian teacher unions and the Liberal government during the 1970s.

### **5.4 Schools of the Future - Overview**

The "Schools of the Future" policy was introduced in conjunction with sweeping educational and administrative changes such as school closures and major redundancies. Its central thrust is the decentralisation of responsibility, authority and accountability to schools within a centrally determined framework of policies, priorities and standard. The philosophy behind this policy is that quality education can only be provided through shifting the focus of educational decision making and resources management to the school community where education is delivered (DSE, 1994a).

Although this decentralisation appears only to be an extension of the previous government's approach, the two differ significantly. Under the Labor government, schools had authority to determine certain aspects of staffing needs and special programs within a large network of consultation and negotiations. The key principle of the Schools of the Future program is the location of full responsibility, authority and accountability at the school level and in particular with the school principal. Authority has been devolved to schools for decisions concerning both the day-to-day operation and personnel issues. Each school is autonomous and independent on the majority of issues. The funding of schools has been altered to support this autonomy.

The phasing in of this policy over the past three years has seen significant changes to the traditional roles, duties and operations of the various facets of state education. The number of Victorian state schools has been reduced by 55 (Basset 1994, p.197), and by December 1993 the number of full time teachers reduced by 8696 or 16.4% (McMurdo, 1994). The greatest impact of the policy is at the school level. Traditional decision making and teaching practices appear to have been affected most. Teacher unions have been excluded from decision-making processes concerning staffing and the priorities of individual schools. Principals' powers have been enhanced, a school charter concept introduced to specify goals and priorities at the school level, and representation on school councils amended to the detriment of union involvement. Each of these are examined below.

## 5.5 School decision making under the Liberal National coalition government

### a) School charter

A key feature of the Liberal National coalition government education policy is the school charter. This is an official document which formalises the school's relationship with its community and the Department of School Education (hereafter DSE). It is developed by schools within guidelines issued by the DSE and based on government policy and expectations. A school charter has two key components, goals and priorities, which specify how a school plans to deliver quality education to its community using the level of resources provided in its global budget. A charter is reviewed every three years and contains:

- A school profile; describing the school's specific educational philosophy
  - School goals
  - School priorities
  - Curriculum profile;
  - Codes of practice
  - Students code of conduct
  - Accountability
  - Budget summary, and
  - Agreement requiring schools to operate within Ministerial Orders, Education Act and regulations
- (DSE, 1994a).

The development of a school charter is the first step in the implementation of Schools of the Future policy. It forms the basis and parameters within which individual schools operate, and is developed by the school community, the principal, staff and the school council. No set framework or direction are given to guide the type of negotiations that can take place. These are at the principal's discretion. Accordingly, the degree of input from the various parties can vary in strength and value from school to school. The charter

processes tend to exclude union representation in contrast to the Local Administrative Committee during the 1980s where union involvement was part of the process. It gives principals wide ranging authority over the working of the school in terms of school policies, ethos and practices and thereby over the school's future direction. In addition, the government's expectations of the charter being based on government policies, leaves little room for negotiations or consultation with local union branches which may conflict with such policies. In theory, school charters are aimed at developing locally based school policies and practices. Teacher unions argue however, that they result in a very rigid system, and erode teacher unions influence over policy development and implementation (VSTA News 1993, March 26).

#### **b) School management**

Under Schools of the Future, schools are managed by the school council, which sets policy guidelines, which in turn are implemented by the school principal. The school council and the principal have vastly different roles, responsibilities and structure from previously. Importantly, they are responsible for the personnel and financial management of schools.

School councils are now legal entities constituted under the Education Act. They consist of the principal, teaching staff, parents and the general community (co-opted members).

School councils have responsibility for the following:

- Education policy of the school
- Selection of school principal
- Employment of non-teaching staff
- Development of students dress code
- Reporting to the community and the DSE
- The financial management of funds and accounts
- Contracting services for the cleaning of the school
- Contracting for undertaking of any construction work (DSE, 1994a).

Each school, following negotiations with the school community, determines its own council composition according to statewide guidelines. Membership can vary between six and fifteen members, with DSE employees, (teachers/school staff), having no more than one third of the membership. This reduction in teacher representation has greatly reduced the role of the unions in school decision-making structures. School councils have had their authority increased to cover areas previously handled by regional and central administration, such as the selection of school principals, the financial management of funds and the appointment of contracted services.

The Labor government had delegated some responsibilities to school councils, however, these were limited to areas such as special-needs staffing and the supervision of school facilities. Under the new structure, school councils play an active role in the policy development of schools, and the management of school funds and educational services. De facto teacher unions' representation on school councils under the previous structure, had ensured direct influence over decisions. However, union representation on school councils is no longer assured as staff representation has been reduced to a third of council membership, and declining union membership has reduced the likelihood of union members being represented. Accordingly, local union branches have suffered a loss of

influence in school decision making.

The shifting of the focus of decision making and educational and resources management to schools has resulted in a significant increase in the power and jurisdiction of school principals. Overall, they are responsible for educational resources, personnel management, school organisation and staff selection. Principals are appointed for a five year fixed term and are eligible for performance payments (up to 15% of base salary) based upon individual contracts. The measure of performance is based on specific result areas agreed to by the principal and the General Manager of Schools (a central regional manager). All staff, including teachers, administration and support staff are selected by the principal. Victoria is the first state in Australia which allows individual government schools to select their own teaching staff. This procedure replaces the former process where teachers were hired by the Education Department and placed in schools by the central regional administration. Other responsibilities previously handled by regional and central administration such as salary and payroll matters, leave administration management and the maintenance of personnel records, are now undertaken by school principals.

### **c) School funding: the global budget**

Schools now have complete control over their financial resources through the allocation of a global budget which covers the full range of staff, services, equipment and supply costs. The global budget is a formula model, with separate formulae used for determining the budget for each category of staff costs, salary associated on-costs and non-salary expenses.

These items are then totalled to give a fixed sum to each school. Although the basis of calculation of budget allocation has remained essentially unchanged, (i.e. it is still based on old staffing formula), the removal of the special needs teacher category has resulted in significant reductions to school staffing entitlements

#### **d) Staffing and terms and conditions of employment**

The former agreements and state award were abolished in 1992. Under Schools of the Future, total school staffing is decided through a Workforce Management Plan and a new Career Structure titled The Professional Recognition Program (hereafter PRP). The Workforce Management Plan is developed at school level without union involvement, whilst the PRP was established at departmental level again without union input.

#### **e) Workforce Management Plan**

The Workforce Management Plan is determined by the school principal after consultation with the school community and forms a vital component of resource planning. The Plan identifies the school's preferred staffing profile, both teaching and non-teaching, a school leadership structure, including promotional positions and a projected salary budget for the next three years. The School's workforce plan is intended to be a "meaningful planning tool to assist decision making on the school budget, to implement good staff management and to satisfy accountability requirements" (DSE, 1995). The school's preferred staffing profile is submitted to the General Manager (schools) for approval upon which a school is granted "full staffing flexibility". This allows schools to recruit staff from within and

outside the DSE, in a mix of ongoing and fixed term employment basis. Under the Workforce Management Plan, approximately 25% of all teaching positions are promotion leading teacher positions. According to the DSE, full staffing flexibility enables a school to: recruit the best available staff, move to a mix of ongoing and fixed term employment, utilise any unused budget allocation for extra staffing or other recurrent expenditure and adopt an appropriate staffing and leadership profile for the individual school (DSE 1994b, p.6).

#### **f) Career structure: The Professional Recognition Program**

Perhaps the most contentious change to working conditions for teachers under the Liberal National coalition government has been the introduction of the PRP. Based on individual contracts, it encourages teachers to abandon a collective link with their unions.

Shortly after its election the government commissioned KPMG Management Consulting to undertake a review of the teacher career structure. The review was conducted without input from or consultation with teacher unions notwithstanding demands from unions for such input. The final report, submitted in September 1994, indicated changes necessary to the existing career structure to achieve the government's vision of Schools of the Future.

In particular, the report stated:

1. Progression through the incremental salary scale should be dependent on satisfactory performance and not be automatic and related only to years of service
2. Opportunities for accelerated progression through the incremental scale should be provided for excellent teachers (KPMG, 1994).

These recommendations were implemented by the Standard Council of The Teaching

Profession, (a new body made up of eight government representatives replacing the Teachers' Registration Board), through the development of a new career structure for teachers based on four levels of professional standards. This new structure is called The Professional Recognition Program. The Four levels are: Level 1 Beginning Teacher, Level 2 Advanced Teacher, Level 3 Leading Teacher and Level 4 Leading Teacher. Table 1 summarises the four levels, and provides a comparison with the equivalent Award levels.

*Table 1 Comparison between PRP and Award conditions*

PRP	AWARD
<p>Level 4 Leading Teacher Role Statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates outstanding level of teaching</li> <li>• Responsible for the implementation of one or more priorities contained in the School's Charter</li> </ul> <p>Typical Duties: Deputy Principal</p> <p>Salary Range: \$47,000-\$51,000</p>	<p>No Award equivalent</p>
<p>Level 3 Leading Teacher Role Statement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly accomplished classroom practitioners</li> <li>• Responsible for leading and managing the achievements of learning outcomes of a large group of students</li> <li>• Integration of curriculum programs</li> <li>• supporting other teachers</li> </ul> <p>Typical Duties:Sub-School Managers</p> <p>Salary: \$46,186</p>	<p>Advanced Skills Teacher 3 Role Statement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly skilled classroom practitioners</li> <li>• Undertakes additional duties outside the classroom</li> <li>• Support a range of complex situations</li> </ul> <p>Typical Duties: Curriculum Co-ordinator</p> <p>Salary: \$43,538</p>
<p>Level 2 Teacher/Advanced Teacher (Seven Increments) Role Statement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent teaching practice</li> <li>• An Organisational role within the school</li> <li>• Provides assistance and peer support to beginning teachers</li> </ul> <p>Typical Duties: Daily Organiser Head Of Department</p> <p>Salary Range: \$33,118-\$40,508</p>	<p>Advanced Skills Teacher 2 Role Statement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performs as skilled classroom practitioner</li> <li>• Undertakes additional tasks requiring contribution outside the classroom</li> </ul> <p>Typical Duties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides assistance to students</li> <li>• Develop/implement new subject</li> </ul> <p>Salary: \$39,975</p>
<p>Level I Beginning Teacher (Five Increments) Role Statement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The focus is typically on classroom management</li> <li>• Develops Subjects</li> <li>• Improved teaching practice</li> </ul> <p>Salary Range: \$26,640-\$31,680</p>	<p>Subdivisions 1-12</p> <p>Automatic progression scale Classroom teachers</p> <p>Salary Range: \$25,654-\$38,950</p>

Victorian teachers were invited to shift to the new career structure from July 1st 1995 and asked to voluntarily sign a "statement of willingness" to move into the new program with an understanding of the benefits and obligations of the PRP including annual review.

Teachers joining the PRP retain entitlements with a promise that salaries will not at any stage be less than the Federal award or any agreements certified or approved by the AIRC. (Victorian teacher unions had gained an interim Federal award in 1993). According to the DSE, the PRP recognises and rewards quality teaching through increases in remuneration based upon performance rather than years of service. It also facilitates principals appointing the appropriate mix of teachers, programs and services. Although not compelled to translate to the PRP, teachers seeking level 3 and 4 positions can only do so through the PRP. The existing automatic progression salary structure, established in the late 1980s continues to run conjointly with the PRP.

In addition, the DSE aims to have 30% of staff employed on fixed term contracts, with only fixed term contracts available for new employees, although these may be on-going in nature. All new fixed term employment agreements entered into after July 1st 1995 are based on the PRP. This is a major change in the terms and conditions of employment for teachers. Previously, all school teachers were employed through central administration on a continuing basis. Although the Federal award still underlines the PRP, the award excludes class sizes. This gives principals the option to increase class sizes as there is no set maximum. This combined with an increase in teaching load to 20 hours per week have resulted in a reduction to staffing entitlement to schools.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

Since the election of the Liberal National coalition government in October 1992, public education in Victoria has undergone comprehensive restructuring. These changes have

been implemented at policy, departmental and school levels. Schools are moving rapidly toward self management within a framework of policies and priorities for education determined by the state government. Teacher unions have been excluded from this restructuring process at each stage, and remain excluded from the governmental processes within schools. The response of unions to these changes will be explored in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### TEACHER UNION RESPONSE TO SCHOOLS OF THE FUTURE

#### 6.1 Introduction

The implementation of the Schools of the Future Policy coupled with changes to the state industrial relations system, have resulted in continuous conflict between teacher unions and the government since 1992. For the first time in ten years, teacher unions were forced to re-think their industrial tactics. The former system of consensus, based on direct negotiations between the government and the unions, was swept aside as the government attempted to deregulate public education.

Government education funding cuts during this period have been substantial. In the period 1992-1994, funding cuts exceeded \$370 million or approximately 18% of the education budget (Legislative Assembly Hansard 11.10.94:840). In the two years to June 1994, 6439 teachers in schools were removed from the payroll (DSE, 1994c). When additional losses of teachers in non-teaching locations, such as those providing curriculum and school support services, are taken into account, this adds up to at least 8000 lost positions (Kronemann, 1995).

The VSTA estimated in 1996 that 271 state schools had closed since 1992. A drift of students from the public sector to private sector education has occurred. Between 1993-94, the government school system lost 7773 students (-1.5%), whilst catholic and

independent schools increased students by 2.5% and 1.8% respectively. The retention rate in the public system fell from 85.4% in February 1993 to 81.3% in 1994 (VSTA News 1994, October 14).

From the beginning, the Liberal National coalition government and the DSE refused to engage in discussions with the teacher unions. Teacher unions believe this stems from the government belief that past governments had been too soft on teacher unions, enabling unions to take over the schools system. Thus, for the first three years of its rule, the government and the DSE refused to negotiate with the unions, except for the Victorian Principals' Association and the VATF (AEU News 1995, December). Teacher unions have responded with a sustained and elaborate industrial campaign.

## **6.2 Union response to overall education policy**

Teacher unions opposed the Liberal National coalition's education policy from the beginning. Four months prior to the state election in June 1992, Peter Lord, President of the FTUV, attacked the coalition's education policy describing it as "...Almost total demolition of the state system of public education..." (Lord 1992, FTUV/Federation News, June 26), and Jude Cazaly, Vice President of the FTUV, described the policy as "...an insult to parents, students, teachers and local communities involved in schooling..." (Cazaly 1992, FTUV/Federation News, August 24). Brian Henderson, the then president of the VSTA, claimed in his address to the 1993 annual general meeting "...the election of the Kennett Liberal government on October 3, 1992, was a black day for the community and government schools..." (Henderson, 1993, VSTA News, August 12).

Teacher unions were opposed to the government's education policy for four overriding reasons. Firstly, they believed the changes to education were introduced for ideological rather than educational reasons. This included an objective of curbing teacher union power, and a commitment to economic rationalism. Secondly, they claimed by introducing market driven imperatives into education, the government was encouraging the privatisation of state schools. Thirdly, teacher unions claim that self-managing schools destroy the right/responsibility nexus which has always been a basic principle of the government education system. Fourthly, self-managing schools lead to significant inequalities in resources as state wide resource allocation and system redress give way to market forces (FTUV/ Federation News 1992, October 23). At a detailed level, the most essential elements of Schools of the Future, namely the power of the principal, the school charter, the new school council and the PRP have attracted the most criticism from the unions. Their criticism of individual components of the Schools of the Future policy are detailed below.

### **6.3 Teacher unions criticism of Schools of the Future policy**

#### **6.3a) The power of the principal**

Under Schools of the Future, principals have increased autonomy from the DSE. They have the power to select staff, allocate promotion and reward teachers through increased remuneration. According to teacher unions, this has the potential of introducing an authoritarian mode of management. Importantly, the power of principals is premised on the abandonment of key sections of the conditions and staffing agreement and the

teachers' award such as automatic wage increments and on-going contract of employment which are now at the discretion of the principal (FTUV/ Federation News 1992, October 23).

### **6.3b) The school charter and the school council**

Teacher unions opposed the school charter on the basis that it provides a mechanism by which schools can be judged unfairly. This, they believe, enhances central control by the DSE and limits the input of teachers into key decisions affecting schools (FTUV/Federation News 1993, July 19). The restriction of one-third DSE employee representation on school councils, the unions argue, makes a mockery of the rhetoric about parent participation on school councils. Parents who are also DSE employees, irrespective of which school they are employed by, are now excluded from council membership. Furthermore, the encouragement of co-opted non-school members leads to the recruitment of people with business rather than educational skills and interests. These changes, according to the unions, are condescending towards parents and appear to encourage schools to look towards outside management of their councils. The changes are contrary to the spirit of participatory democracy and the empowerment of parents and teachers through participation (VSTA News 1993, March 26).

### **6.3c) The global budget**

Financial resourcing under Schools of the Future is allocated centrally under a one off formula. According to teacher unions, this mechanism forces schools to increasingly rely

on school generated funds to cover programs and activities formerly provided by State funding such as special needs teachers. Schools in wealthier areas will inevitably access more funding from local communities and sponsorship than those in economically depressed areas. Thus inequalities between schools will increase and there is a danger of the government school system becoming stratified.

Under the global budget funding model, although money is allocated on the basis of staff/student ratio, it is not mandatory that schools spend such allocation on staffing. Schools now determine the staffing level and mix of teachers taking into account other resource needs. They must juggle competing demands, such as teaching and non-teaching positions, curriculum resources and maintenance within the global budget. According to the unions, in a time of diminishing resources, schools are under pressure to employ fewer and cheaper less experienced staff. Comparisons of staff student ratios between 1991 and 1994 support this concern. Having had one of the lowest staff student ratio in Australia, ratios have increased beyond the national average. In 1991 Victorian staff student ratios were: primary schools 1:14 and secondary schools 1:9.6. By 1994, the ratios had become primary schools 1:19.3 and secondary schools 1:13.3. The national average is: primary 1:14.6, secondary 1:9.7 (VSTA News 1993, August 26).

Finally, teacher unions claim that this type of funding pushes the responsibilities and the hard decisions about allocation of limited resources down to the school level. Potential hardships will not be perceived as the government's fault when it is the school that made the decision (FTUV/ Federation News 1993, July 19).

### **6.3d) The Professional Recognition Program**

The PRP allows early access to small salary increases in exchange for teachers accepting individual contracts, the abolition of their current career structure and agreeing to take on more unpaid duties in addition to their classroom teaching. Most importantly, the PRP provides a career structure based on the principal's discretion and subject to global budget constraints. The PRP was opposed by the teacher unions for a number of reasons: firstly, for employees commencing employment after the introduction of the PRP, only short term contracts are available, usually on a term basis which does not cover holiday periods. Hence community accepted conditions such as long service leave and sick leave are not accrued. Secondly, there is no guarantee of further contracts of employment resulting in lack of employment security thereby undermining one of the major gains of teacher unions in the 1980s. Thirdly, employment contracts contain provisions allowing for variations by the DSE without consultation with the employee. Fourthly, teacher unions were concerned that individual contracts would undermine the establishment of a Federal award by the ATU (FTUV/Federation News 1993, April 30).

In addition, teacher unions have claimed that the government's abolition of the various boards and regional and local support services leads to inequitable distribution of teachers and resources across the state. The abolition of the Teacher Registration Board for example, removes the statewide nature of transfer and promotion rights and abolishes control of entry, which for the past twenty years had been handled through statewide central administration. This, according to teacher unions, is a cynical attempt to decollectivise and divide teachers (Bluett, 1995).

As can be seen by Table 2, the Schools of the Future policy has reversed most of the gains that were achieved by teacher unions during the 1980s.

*Table 2 Gains of the 1980s lost by teacher unions in the 1990s.*

<b>STRUCTURAL</b>	<b>INDUSTRIAL</b>	<b>RESOURCES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Board Of Education abolished</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Employee Relations Act 1992 introduced</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary and Secondary schools closed</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Boards abolished</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Public Sector Management Act introduced</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching positions lost</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Council structure and role changed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Victorian Government Teaching Service Award 1991 abolished</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closure of most support services- Regional and Central</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Victorian Board Of Studies administering curriculum from Prep to year 12</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staffing and Conditions agreements abolished</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elimination of Special Needs staffing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in power and jurisdiction of principals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victorian Industrial Relations Commission abolished</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class sizes increased</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registration Board abolished</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce Management Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in teacher workload</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards Council for teaching made up of 8 government representatives replacing Registration Board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PRP &amp; Individual Contracts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease in administrative and non-teaching staff</li> </ul>

Teacher unions believe that a quality public school system is dependent on five elements. Firstly, industrial and personnel functions should be centralised to ensure equity. Secondly, the equitable distribution of curriculum support and coherent policy direction is dependent on the maintenance of a state wide participatory infrastructure. Thirdly, teacher employment should be centrally administered in order to ensure professionalism of teachers. Fourthly, conditions and staffing agreements are essential for the protection of teachers' working conditions, and lastly, a "no string attached" approach to salary increases and a career structure which has the enforceability of an award is required (FTUV/Federation News 1992, October 30). All of these conditions, according to teacher unions, provide for industrial stability and an efficient, well resourced and proficient

system of state education. Each of these factors was undermined by the state government education policy.

#### **6.4 Teacher unions industrial response to the government's education policy**

In 1992, in response to the substantial funding cut backs and the massive restructuring of state schools, teacher unions began an industrial campaign aimed at restoring their influence over educational matters and curtailing the government's deregulatory approach to state education. The VSTA and the FTUV jointly opposed what they described as "...the Kennett government's attack on the rights of employees and its planned attack on education..." (FTUV/Federation News 1992, November 13). Following their respective 1992 annual conferences, the unions decided that united and concerted effort was required to successfully campaign against the Liberal National coalition government. Hence, the idea of a single Victorian teachers' union was pursued. In the interim, joint union campaign committee meetings were held to consider joint action and co-ordinate industrial activities. The initial teacher unions campaign was widespread and included:

1. Joint strike action (1992, 1993, 1994,1995)
2. Continuous industrial action with clusters of schools being rostered to take half day stoppages (1992, 1993, 1994,1995)
3. Public rallies (1992, 1993)
4. Political campaign in all state electorates with selected marginal electorates targeted for an intensive campaign through to the next state election (1993, 1994, 1995)
5. Utilising parents to explain implication of cuts (1992, 1993)
6. Classroom teaching campaign, ie work to rule campaign, (1993, 1994)
7. Ban on Coalition politicians and Geoff Spring, Director Of The DSE, visiting schools (1993,1994)
8. Writing to parents and newspapers to explain impact of cuts (1993)

By February 1993, industrial action, in one form or another, occurred on a daily basis with

teacher unions campaigning especially strongly against the pilot scheme of Schools of the Future. However, the industrial campaign was fruitless. The government and the DSE introduced their planned reforms unabated and continued to refuse to meet with the unions. Subsequently, teacher unions revised their tactics and in March 1993 four options were presented to members. These were: do nothing, pursue collective contracts, pursue individual contracts or continue industrial action and pursue a Federal award (VSTA News 1993, March 11). The first three options were rejected. Option one, although affording some short-term protection for current employees, would disadvantage new employees who would be required to sign contracts. Options two and three were rejected because experience indicated that contracts could be legislated against by the government at any time. Hence, it was decided that, in addition to heightening the existing campaign action, teacher unions would pursue a Federal award with the ATU.

## **6.5 Federal award**

As the success of establishing a Federal award was largely dependent upon the Federal Labor government maintaining power at the election of March 1993, teacher unions campaigned vigorously in Victorian marginal seats during the Federal election. The move towards a Federal award also hastened teacher unions' earlier decision to consider union amalgamation. Accordingly, a single Australian Education Union (hereafter AEU), (formerly ATU), Victorian branch, subsuming the Kindergarten Teachers' Association of Victoria, (hereafter KTAV), the FTUV and the VSTA was created.

The AIRC granted an interim Federal award for teachers in 1993. The Victorian

government responded in two ways. Firstly, they unsuccessfully appealed the AIRC's decision to grant an interim Federal award, and secondly, the DSE continued to refuse to bargain with teacher unions. These tactics served to delay the granting of the Federal award and worsened relations between the government and the teacher unions.

The Victorian teachers unions and the AEU attempted to recover lost features of the State (Government Teaching Service Award) 1990 through the Federal award. By and large, the Federal award includes most, though not all, of the former conditions of employment. Some conditions are less than before: for example hours of face to face teaching. Other conditions are now unregulated. Class sizes, for example are excluded altogether and are no longer uniform across the state. The AIRC called on the parties, at school level, to negotiate class size on the basis that workload not be unfairly excessive or otherwise unreasonable. The Commission further proposed each school should have a conciliation procedure involving the AEU to determine an appropriate workload. Although the AEU in Victoria was far from happy with this outcome, Peter Lord, President AEU Victorian branch, stated "...the commission's decision vindicates our decision to seek an award on teacher workload matters..." (AEU News 1995, July 14).

## **6.6 Conclusion**

Over the past four years, teacher unions in Victoria have initiated and maintained a strong industrial campaign aimed at regaining working conditions established in the 1980s. Various tactics and sources have been utilised. However, the campaign has had little

impact upon the government's approach to the teacher unions. Hence, teacher unions have lost most of the gains made during the 1980s in terms of the industrial agreements and influence over the state's education policy, so much so that it is argued by some that Victorian teacher unions have become irrelevant. The AEU Victorian Branch disputes such allegations, claiming that notwithstanding the lack of union influence at both policy and industrial levels, the AEU Victorian branch still has a role to play in state education (Bluett 1996). They claim that notwithstanding the attempts to destroy the education unions, they have been able to frustrate the government's agenda enormously. The Federal award has protected teachers from major elements of the Public Sector Management Act, especially with respect to fines and stand down threats which were directed at employees. The Federal Award has also protected teachers from the Employee Relations Act. In terms of benefits to members, the union claims that there has been an ability to hold the tide, although this has been reactive rather than proactive.

Notwithstanding the unions' view, the evidence suggests that teacher unions in Victoria have been excluded from critical issues, both industrial and educational, affecting teachers. On industrial issues, teachers are now covered by a Federal award, but this provides for lower standards on some issues than were previously available under state awards and agreements. A range of school-level decisions, such as number of teachers, which teacher unions previously had input into, are now decided without consultation and with minimal teacher or union involvement. One outcome of this is an increase in teacher workload, evidenced by the dramatic shift in student/teacher ratios noted earlier. The union has also lost ground on wages in education. The PRP scheme has been widely accepted by teachers as undermining the AEU's ability to comprehensively represent teachers

employed in the state system. Turning to education issues, again it is difficult to see how the teacher union is “holding the tide”. Teacher unions remain excluded from the main forums in which education issues are decided from school council level through to state government policy level. Questions about educational resources, such as the need for special needs teachers, are now answered without reference to the union and with only limited input from teachers. One consequence of these changes, whether intentional or not, has been to not only exclude the teacher unions, but to a large extent teachers themselves, from participation in decision-making on issues directly impacting upon them.

To what extent, then have teacher unions achieved their objectives in the 1990s? For both industrial and educational objectives, the unions and hence membership, have lost ground. But the teacher unions are not the only state unions to suffer this outcome. Other public sector unions have also suffered from having the government as employer and legislator. Neither political nor industrial campaigns have offered an effective response to the government’s policies on education and teaching. The determination of the state government to exclude unions from decision making in education appears to have been overwhelmingly effective. A remarkable degree of change has been introduced to provide alternate and non-participatory mechanisms for decision-making. At the same time, economic constraints imposed on individual schools have provided a clear incentive to principals to implement arbitrary decisions on working conditions in areas where previously union involvement, either directly or indirectly, was taken for granted. Conversely, the AEU, citing the example of the Federal award and the union's ability to frustrate the government's agenda as major wins, claims that it has survived well over the past four years despite the drop in membership base. However, whether mere survival

proves to be enough in so far as members are concerned remains to be seen.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 Introduction

When the Liberal-National coalition was elected in a landslide victory in October 1992, they laid claim to an unprecedented mandate to implement major changes. Education, one of the state's major source of budgetary outlays, has been a significant target for change, both in terms of spending and operations. These have been implemented over the past four years through the phasing in of Schools of the Future policy.

This thesis is concerned with the Victorian teacher unions' behaviour and impact on state education since the early 1980s. Two distinct phases are apparent. The first phase is the 1980s, a period of successive labor governments and strong teacher union involvement in education. This reversed in the second phase, beginning in 1992 when the election of the Liberal-National coalition party was accompanied by major changes to state education and a substantial reduction in the role of teacher unions.

Essential concepts such as trade union aims and objectives were defined in chapter 2 establishing the analytical framework for this thesis. The characteristics of teacher unions were then discussed before turning to an account of the degree of influence, the methods used and gains made and lost by teacher unions during the 1980s and 1990s.

## 7.2 Trade unions' aims and objectives

Trade unions' aims were described as being largely diverse, ranging from serving the economic interests of the working class to social and political transformation. Most writers on the subject agree on the diversity of the goals and objectives of trade union. A number of authors, such as Flanders sought to understand the nature of trade unions' aims and objectives through observing their behaviour concluding that trade unions serve two basic purposes: job regulation and control. Martin (1989), classifies trade unions into five categories according to their purpose: The Pluralist, the Syndicalist, the Marxist/Leninist, the Authoritarian and the Organicist, concluding that trade unions' aims and objectives are very diverse and varied. Rawson (1986) on the other hand, saw two basic competing purposes of trade unions: improvement of members interests and the social transformation of capitalist society. Deery (1989) identified four principle objectives as the primary concerns of most Australian trade unions. These are: the provision of direct services to members, improved conditions of employment, organisational security and political objectives.

A study of Victorian teacher unions' aims and objectives by Spaul (1986) revealed that teacher unions' aims may be classified into four categories: industrial, educational, political and institutional objectives. These do not differ greatly from those of other trade unions except to reflect the specific occupational interests of teachers. These aims and objectives have remained consistent throughout teacher unions history, as evident in their respective constitutions, regardless of circumstances and the environment within which they operate. However, the priorities and methods of achieving these aims tend to be

influenced by various internal and external constraints and barriers as described by Gardner (1992). This change in priorities and methods can be seen clearly when examining teacher unions' objectives and strategies during the 1980s and early 1990s.

### **7.3 1980s Objectives**

Following the election of the Cain Labor government in 1982, Victorian teacher unions were able to improve their members interests and conditions of employment by concentrating on two areas: firstly, by improving terms and conditions of employment through directly negotiating collective agreements with the state government. Secondly, by influencing education policy formulation and educational resources through their close association with the Victorian Labor Party. This included extensive participation in decision making at various levels within the education system. As a consequence, teacher unions during the 1980s were able to ensure favourable industrial, educational and structural resources gains for their members.

### **7.4 1990s Objectives**

Since the election of the Liberal National coalition government in 1992, Victorian teacher unions priorities have shifted to focus on retaining past industrial gains, attempting, unsuccessfully, to retain jobs for their members, and re-establishing organisational security through the amalgamation of the two unions.

## 7.5 Means of achieving aims and objectives

Unlike other trade unions, Victorian teacher unions during the 1980s pursued the attainment of their goals by concentrating more on political activities than industrial avenues. However, since the election of the Liberal National coalition government in 1992, teacher unions have been forced to abandon the use of political tactics as their main method of achieving their aims and objectives.

Why did teacher unions concentrate their efforts on political lobbying during the 1980s ahead of industrial or other strategies? Arguments put forward by Deery (1989) and Gardner (1986), are relevant to explaining teacher unions' behaviour during the 1980s. Deery suggests that the methods used by trade unions, and the emphasis placed on achieving their goals, are dependent on a number of factors including size, structure and political orientation of the union. Similarly, according to Gardner, trade unions' strategic choice necessarily involves consideration of constraints and barriers faced by the union at the time (Gardner 1986, p.72). These include internal and external constraints and possibilities such as the political environment, the market place, management, membership base and outcomes of prior political campaigns. Furthermore, Gardner describes trade unions' methods as extending from political lobbying and propaganda activities through to various forms of negotiations, although only two strategies are possible. These are industrial and political (Gardner 1986, p.75). According to Gardner, unions with predominantly public sector membership dependent on state funding will almost inevitably "choose" to undertake campaigns in the political arena in order to achieve their aims and objectives (Gardner 1986, p.177).

## 7.6 1980s Strategies

Victorian teacher unions' relationship with the Labor government of the 1980s typify the premises put forward by Gardner and Deery. For most of the 1980s, in pursuing their aims, teacher unions followed a strategy of united action which required a centralised direction. Their "most preferred strategy" lay in the political arena, initially providing administrative and financial support to the ALP during election campaigns. This laid the foundation for later methods which essentially revolved around political lobbying and industrial negotiations, leading to involvement at government policy level and influence over various committees, tribunals and commissions through active representation.

The examination of Victorian teacher unions methods during the 1980s, presented in Chapter 4, revealed a distinct preference for political strategies. The position of teachers as state employees appears to be a significant factor in this regard. As public sector employees, teachers are subject to the effects of education policies developed by political parties, planning decisions made within the educational system and within the state bureaucracy as a whole. Decisions concerning the work conditions of teachers are inherently of a political and industrial nature. Like other employers, the government will seek to control and direct the activities of their employees. Public sector unions such as teacher unions, will therefore seek to influence education and industrial relations policies in order to create a favourable environment which offers direct benefits to their members.

Overall, teacher unions during the 1980s, maintained extensive links with the Labor government, directing their energy towards the key goal of improving and protecting

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Overall, teacher unions during the 1980s, maintained extensive links with the Labor government, directing their energy towards the key goal of improving and protecting

conditions through extensive involvement at all levels of the education decision-making spectrum, but especially policy formulation level. This was attainable due to a sympathetic Labor government. This is consistent with Flanders view of trade unions controlling and regulating employment relations in order to achieve aims and objectives. Whilst favourable conditions existed during the 1980s, teacher unions were able to gain unprecedented wage increases and improved working conditions for their members.

### **7.7 1990s Strategies**

The tactics so successfully pursued by teacher unions in the 1980s have not had the same impact since the election of the Liberal National coalition government in 1992. This may be explained in part by the fact that political strategy requires the government to recognise the union as the legitimate voice of workers, and in part by changes in circumstances and the general environment, such as the political scene and management, which accompanied the change in government.

Since the election of the Liberal National coalition government, teacher unions have been unable to influence the government's agenda at the policy level nor decision making at the school level. The lack of union involvement at the policy and local level is the result of the government's refusal to negotiate with unions nor to acknowledge them as a legitimate part of state education. A successful political strategy is largely dependent upon having favourable circumstances. However, in the 1990s teacher unions have been faced with an unfavourable political and macroeconomic environment, an unfavourable legal environment and a hostile management in the DSE. The government has resisted

lobbying and refused to negotiate with teacher unions. The Liberal National coalition government, supported by a large parliamentary majority and buoyed by public support, has continually ignored teacher unions. Subsequently, teacher unions were unable to influence the government at the policy level and were forced to abandon political lobbying as the main method of achieving their aims and objectives.

Over the past four years teacher unions have turned to industrial strategies to re-establish their influence over the state education system. But to date, these appear to have been unsuccessful. School closures which presented a strong threat of job losses, have weakened teachers' resolve and limited the effectiveness of industrial methods. The removal of automatic payroll deductions, resulting in a substantial membership loss, has further weakened the effectiveness of collective action. The government has undercut union influence by promoting individualism and self-interest through tying wage increases to a new pay scale developed without union involvement. Through their use of these various tactics, the government over the past four years has eroded Victorian teacher unions ability to effectively pursue one of their fundamental aims, improving the working conditions and interests of their members. Hence at both the political and industrial level, union influence has been circumvented by government policy.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

During the 1980s Victorian teacher unions were a positive source of change in teachers' working conditions and the state education system. Teacher unions took direct political action and utilised their influence over the Labor government to attain their aims of

improving working conditions for their members and the Victorian Education system in general. Their actions demonstrated the value to teachers of direct intervention in the political process. Now, teacher unions have been forced to the defensive. They have lost substantial ground because of the changing political and economic circumstances.

This study of Victorian teacher unions during two distinct phases highlights the need for unions to adopt strategies to changing circumstances and the need to consider coherent alternatives to meet these circumstances. It also highlights the constraints faced by unions when their members' employer is also the state with all-embracing legislative power. Teacher unions have been able to place a floor under minimum terms and conditions of employment by shifting to an alternate sphere of regulation, namely the Federal industrial relations system. But for other key areas impacting on teachers, and their unions, neither political nor industrial strategies have been effective in the face of a hostile employer supported by state powers.

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