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AEU 2006 FEDERAL CONFERENCE STATEMENT

The Australian Education Union held its annual Federal Conference in Brisbane on January 14 – 16, 2006.

Delegates unanimously supported the following statement:

The Australian Education Union (AEU) representing over 165,000 educators condemns the Federal Government's criminal neglect of public education and the aggressive pursuit by the Federal Minister, Brendan Nelson, of simplistic and dangerous education policies.

In 2006 there will be a continued, strong and concerted response to that attack from workers in public education.

Public education is the key to a vibrant future for Australia. That future will embrace social justice and human rights as well as sustainable economic growth.

The AEU will work with the broader union movement and the community to create a movement for social justice including the protection of workers' rights.

1. The National Public Education Campaign

Control of both Houses of Parliament has enabled the Coalition Government to push ahead with its relentless attack on public education.

The Federal Government is determined to impose its own political agenda on state and territory governments and on public education systems through placing conditions on funding. Political interference in teaching and learning has increased, privatisation continues to be encouraged and public education continues to be under-resourced as a result of the Coalition's unfair funding policies. The Government's industrial relations agenda has been linked to funding, particularly in TAFE.

The AEU will continue to campaign for the maintenance and continued improvement of high quality public education accessible to all Australians. In the lead up to the next federal election, the AEU will ensure that the community is made aware of the issues facing public education.

2. Funding

The AEU will continue to oppose the Federal Government's funding model for schools, which is unfair and massively skewed in favour of private schools. The AEU will continue to campaign for a funding model which gives priority to funding public schools and calls on all governments to support the development of a resource benchmark funding guarantee.

Changes to federal Indigenous funding continue to have a negative impact on Indigenous students and their families in the public education system. The AEU will continue to campaign for a just Indigenous education funding model and to resist the job loss and cuts in hours for support staff employed through such funding.

The Federal Government continues to under-fund vocational education and training. The AEU will continue to campaign for the provision of adequate resources for public TAFE systems to ensure that all Australians have access to high quality vocational and second chance education and training.

The Federal Government provides no funding to ensure universal access to preschool education. The AEU will continue to campaign for the resources required to ensure that all children in Australia have access to high quality, free, public preschool education.

3. Industrial Relations

The AEU opposes the further undermining of the rights of Australian workers by the current Federal Government.

The *Workchoices* legislation gives primacy to individual contracts over collective agreements. It purports to regulate industrial relations for all constitutional corporations to the exclusion of state industrial relations laws; ends conciliation and arbitration; makes federal awards irrelevant; restricts matters which may be the subject of agreement between employers and employees; severely limits access to remedies for unfair dismissal; places severe restrictions on industrial action; and severely restricts the right of workers to access unions in the workplace.

The AEU will continue to resist these attacks through active participation in the ACTU Workers' Rights Campaign, as well as promoting opportunities for independent analysis of the impact of the *Workchoices* legislation and the industrial conditions attached to education funding.

The AEU will maintain a vigorous public critique of the Howard industrial relations agenda. The AEU will continue to educate and mobilise our members as activists in their communities.

4. Human Rights and Social Justice

The protection of human rights and civil liberties is fundamental to a peaceful and just democracy. It is of great concern that the Howard Government's actions on a range of fronts are undermining human rights in Australia.

Legislation on sedition has the capacity to erode freedom of speech, protest and artistic expression. Healthy debate and dissent will be undermined. The preventative detention and control orders contained within the Anti-Terrorism legislation seriously encroach on centuries of legal protection, including the right to liberty and the presumption of innocence.

The AEU will continue to campaign to protect the human rights and civil liberties that are fundamental to a just, civil and democratic state. An inclusive socially representative public education system remains the key to achieving this. The AEU will work with organisations and communities that seek to assure the maintenance of Australians' human rights. The AEU and Branches and Associated Bodies will engage in discussions on how best to achieve the protection of human rights and civil liberties, through domestic legal means and other mechanisms.

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