

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Ready, set, NO

“ The federal government’s radical plan to overhaul industrial relations is drawing together many critics. Church leaders, economists, unions, welfare organisations and others have strongly condemned the proposed laws that would contribute to the already widening gap between rich and poor. The vast majority of workers would be unable to improve their salaries and conditions.

Teachers, as state government employees, are largely exempt from the reach of the corporations power but the federal government has already flagged that it will overcome this inconvenience by tying federal funding to acceptance of the new agenda.

Unless state and territory governments are willing to reject the federal

large system—even where individual principals are being required to bargain on the employer’s behalf—will mean that the capacity for movement within a negotiation process will be almost nil, with most employees being offered a set contract which they will be required to sign. Principals will be required to ‘negotiate’ within the constraints of the state budget.

There is no doubt that, without a collective process, conditions will soon vary widely across the public sector. More and more pressure will be placed on individuals to sacrifice conditions for salary.

The federal government also wants to limit what employers and employees can agree to. Significant fines apply for even attempting to register an agreement containing an agreed unfair-dismissal process or trade union training leave.

Over the last few decades, teacher unionists have made a conscious decision to involve themselves in negotiations about professional, as well as industrial, matters. This has resulted in considerable improvements in areas such as class size, teacher preparation time, curriculum development, changes to assessment and reporting, career paths and professional learning.

These successes have largely resulted from the collective nature of our bargaining processes. Through informally benchmarking our progress in these matters, union branches and associated bodies have ensured some

consistency around the country.

Individual contractual arrangements will severely limit any ‘whole of profession’ benefits from being achieved. Individual teachers or principals will not be able to improve the way professional learning is delivered, for example. This will now be truly the prerogative of the employer.

At the school level, individual contracts will increase anxiety and take time and resources away from the real work of teaching. School leaders will be expected to conduct negotiations on behalf of the government.

For both teachers and school leaders, collegiality will be undermined and resentment and suspicion will flourish. Critical thinking and expression will have no place in our education system.

What these changes will bring—if they are allowed to work as intended—is a full frontal assault on the collective nature of teaching and on our capacity to influence the public interest.

We will continue to be told that the public interest will be served by market influences—that for schools and school systems to be competitive they will have to increase salaries and improve conditions and therefore there is nothing to worry about. This is untrue.

We know there will be no gain in this for the children from poor, isolated or otherwise disadvantaged communities. Schools will close. There will be no gain for the vast majority of teachers. There will be no gain for the public or common good. ”

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contribution towards government schooling—approximately 10 per cent—most teachers will face the reality of AWAs in the next bargaining rounds. In fact, AEU members in TAFEs and some NSW teachers are already faced with this.

Make no mistake: the proposed changes will have a negative effect on the growth of teacher salaries and conditions, as well as long-term detrimental effects on the teaching profession itself.

They are dangerous proposals—as attested to by the secrecy and confidentiality provisions which apply to AWAs.

The reality of being employed by a

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