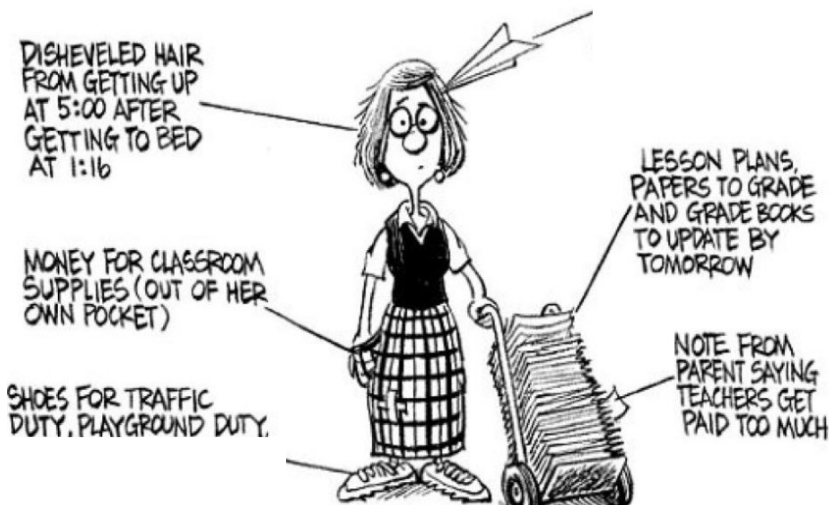


Uniting the breakout : from Gonski to permanency

**A platform for a militant fight against
austerity: for pay, public school funding &
permanent staffing.**

THE MODERN SCHOOLTEACHER



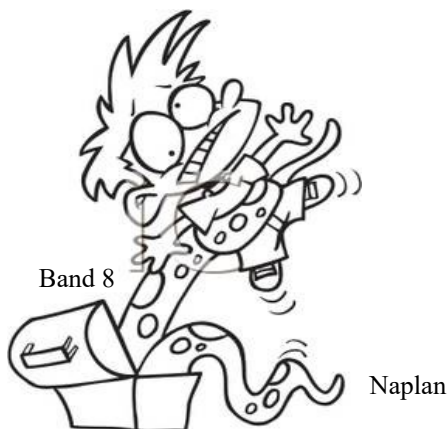
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Edited by John Morris, Teacher, Sir Joseph Banks High School

Introduction

One uncanny characteristic about an octopus is its innate ability to escape from a box.

In 2012, the Activist Teachers Network (ATN) published a pamphlet titled 'Resisting Austerity – From NY to Your School'. It featured a cartoon of an octopus delivered in a box, representing the New York neo-liberal model of education, that the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard was determined to impose in Australia.

Gillard was then the doyen of schools funding, despite her tardiness in implementing the recommendations of the Gonski panel's school funding recommendations.



Fast forward to 2017, and the parental backlash against the band 8 result for Year 9 NAPLAN as a barrier to a later HSC is symptomatic of the tenacious tentacles of GERM (Global Education Reform Movement), or the “New York Model” of education. HOPE (Hsc, Opportunity, Potential, 4 Everyone) parents, collecting over 10,000 signatures at change.org, are now seeking the same for a formal petition to The NSW Parliament.

NSW arguably leads other Australian states limiting much of the New York model. A state-wide staffing system dampens devolution. Teachers select teachers for employment, with parental assistance not control. Pay rises occur through collective bargaining, albeit wrapped with intruding tentacles of performance based “standards”, and capped to 2.5% by government fiat, falling well behind housing cost rises.

However, the band 8 barrier, as well as other manifestations such as the NSW government’s “Bump It Up” performance target to increase “the proportion of NSW students in the top two NAPLAN bands by eight per cent by 2019”, verify ATN’s central argument from 2012:

“Whilst it may not seem like NAPLAN is the most imminent of fights in the midst of a campaign around devolution (or currently Gonski – editor), NAPLAN is ignored at our peril. It was and remains the cornerstone of a marketised model of education. It provides bureaucrats with the quantitative data they need to create division and competition between teachers and schools. It is the stick used to measure so-called teacher performance. And, it whitewashes the complex and nuanced impacts of social disadvantage upon educational outcome and instead becomes the blunt instrument upon which school performance is assessed.”

'Resisting Austerity' was written in the context of a NSW Liberals crushing the long-term Labor government in 2011, then capping wages and removing access to the IRC (industrial court). Joel Klein, the architect of the New York Model, moved into the office of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, part of the growing global education business market.

Meanwhile, movements erupted in response to recession, repression, corruption, inequality and austerity, from the Arab Spring, to Wisconsin workers, the indignados movement in Spain, mass general strikes in Greece, the global Occupy movement, and the mammoth movement in Chile for public education (as a result of which, Chile is no longer the largest funder of private schools in the OECD...Australia is!

Today, the universal, comprehensive education model that has existed since Australian Federation a century ago, still standing but with a stagger, continues to be under assault, confirming the threat outlined in ATN's 'The New York Model: A Critical briefing paper' (2009).

However, since 2012 developments and challenges have arisen as the union movement has resisted austerity against the agenda of global capital and edu-business, as well as our local political, business and administrative players. Some of these are:

- further concentration of wealth into the hands of the rich, with spending on private infrastructure such as the \$25 billion WestConnex tollway and export coal rail lines, at the expense of the living conditions of a growing, alienated underclass.
- workload pressures on teachers, compounded by social breakdown as cuts and privatisations see shifting of the welfare state onto schools, irrelevant workload from cyclical curriculum change and growing credentialling and auditing requirements.

- Movements such as 'March in March', anti-coal seam gas blockaders, and resistance to local government amalgamations have expressed community rejection of 30 years of the neo-liberal agenda, and contributing to taking the scalps of NSW Premier Mike Baird and former PM Tony Abbott in the process.
- hard won increases to schools funding, albeit while not touching the lavish government handouts to the private school sector under former Coca-Cola executive David Gonski's funding model, yet posing a strategic threat to union density as the additional teachers gained from such funding increases are employed on a temporary, cyclical basis.
- In NSW and federally, both the Tory Liberal party and the ALP are in crisis, stuck in a legacy of five Prime Ministers in five years, as politics across the globe has become highly unstable, and our rulers continue to attempt to shift the burden onto workers via measures such as penalty rates cuts.
- the ascent of Sally MacManus to become Secretary of the ACTU, with a national declaration that unjust laws should be broken, representing a growing mood for fightback against austerity by organised labour, from CFMEU construction workers to child care workers from United Voice.

The Breakout from Austerity

Two national strikes by the CFMEU against the ABCC (Australian Building and Construction Commission) and penalty rates cuts, and strike action by the NSW public bus drivers against privatisation and service cuts, represent a hard edge of defiance by organised labour, supported within the community's wider rejection of neo-liberalism.



CFMEU penalty rates, ABCC rally in Sydney and Melbourne, 20 June 2017

In this context, there is a lot of sectional campaigning either by unions such as the nurses' fight for better bed ratios, or community action against WestConnex. While worthwhile struggles in themselves, they will be more successful when each

campaign sees itself as part of a larger movement to reverse 3 decades of neo-liberal cuts.

Our sectional Gonski campaigning also has to be seen in this context. It is not an end in itself. Rather, it is one part of improving the lives of students in NSW, Australia, and as global citizens. Teachers, as education workers, also need a reversal of eroding working conditions and pay, and this will happen more effectively within solidarity with the rest of the workers' movement and the wider community.

We are well placed strategically to gain such support, as working class parents across all industries have a direct material interest in well-resourced public schools and public school educators.

“Gonski 2.0”- another shot from the Coca-Cola executive?”

The Liberals have managed to coax and con the Senate to pass their “needs based” school funding scheme. It’s nothing of the sort. Turnbull and Birmingham have for now succeeded in entrenching the funding of private schools to 80% per cent of their School Resourcing Standard (SRS), compared to only 20% for public schools.

Unsurprisingly however, voters would prefer more money for public schools rather than Turnbull’s \$65 billion in company tax cuts. (AEU commissioned polling 2016)

With Gonski 2.0, the Greens and the ALP must stand firm in demanding not just the full amount of “Gonski” dollars, but a radical redistribution of funding towards public schools—which Julia Gillard’s original terms of reference which stressed that “no

school would lose a dollar” ruled out. Although under attack from her party room for her stance against Gonski 2.0, it was NSW Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon’s “left wing rigidity” which helped save The Greens from a potentially disastrous GST moment. She and the NSW Greens will be a crucial ally in the battles ahead.

Moreover, to end the incredible inequality in the Australian education system and the workload crisis that teachers face, the AEU, The Greens and the ALP must also now seriously reconsider their support for the original Gonski model of funds distribution.

The excesses of government funding of elite schools is in the spotlight, explaining why the Liberals have hung out a few, to sate appetites for more. Class conscious sentiment is linked to the resistance against austerity, and not a diversion that could derail a full schools funding campaign, or undermine the close, yet problematic, relationship Senior Officers have developed with the NSW government.

It is clearer now to see that Gonski cements government funding for private schools, and entrenches a narrow focus on NAPLAN scores. Indeed, the new review Turnbull has tasked David Gonski with promises to devise more ways to tie school funding to the imposition of more “accountability” tasks that undermine teacher autonomy.

Gonski’s education funding was never “sector blind”. It was a cover-up for increasing inequality and maintaining massive funding for private schools. Our wholesale acceptance of this aspect of Gonski tied one hand behind our backs in our struggle for school funding justice. The concentration of students into “rich” and “poor” schools is accelerating social inequality. Private

schools are a core element of this stratification process. There is no justification for funding this inequality.

In an article titled 'Liberal schools plan Con: Gonski's model flawed', Lucy Honan, a public high school teacher in Melbourne's western suburbs argues:

"Gonski's SRS formula was supposed to be the minimum a school needs to get 80 per cent of its students, accounting for demographic background, to achieve a NAPLAN standard. The formula did not include money for school buildings and land, extra-curricular or enrichment activities, or health and welfare support.

The formula distorts school priorities through a narrow obsession with test scores and teacher "accountability" measures.....all public schools must have the resources to run according to international best practice.

Preparation time in Australia should be comparable to that of the exceptional school systems in Finland or Shanghai where teachers only spend 15 and 14 hours a week in front of students respectively. Australian teachers spend 20 hours.

Instead of keeping the tap of public funds on for private schools, and imposing a narrow NAPLAN agenda, we need a campaign that demands public funds for fully funded public schools"

Solidarity Magazine, online

The "meme based" approach to campaigning, with green cakes and shirts, as opposed to transporting masses of teachers to Canberra, is a problem that infects much of the Australian union movement's "community" campaigning. There will be more on this later in this pamphlet, not least from Tim Lyons, a former ACTU assistant secretary.

Staffing permanency in NSW school funding

To a great extent politicians and business have been able to throw the risk and responsibility for their shaky post 2008 GFC (Global Financial Crisis) world onto workers. The review of school

funding that later became known as “Gonski” presented an opportunity to not just address student needs, but to also improve teachers’ working conditions. The current staffing protocols include a clause that allows a provision for principals to make additional Gonski funded positions permanent. However, principals have not enacted this due to uncertainty over political and funding cycles, and opposition from the DET’s Staffing unit.

Permanency is gold, and despite its dilution in recent years, the NSW state-wide staffing system remains a counter to devolution. However, the union faces a strategic threat when the rate of casualisation increases. Union density is industrial strength, the reverse manifesting in TAFE, withered by job cuts and competitive tendering delivered to dodgy providers.

Victoria gives us a glimpse of what devolution looks like. It was described by the ATN’s Andrew Viller in 'The New York Model: A Critical briefing paper’ back in 2009:

“It is worth noting, that Victoria has existed under a devolved model for some time. In their system, principals make annual decisions about their staffing mix and advertise for casual-temporary teachers who can be contracted to fill the gaps. This has led to an expansion of casualisation and the creation of two-tiered staffing system. There are those that have tenure and those that are precariously employed as contract casuals. The latter group must reapply for their jobs annually and go through the merit selection procedures.”

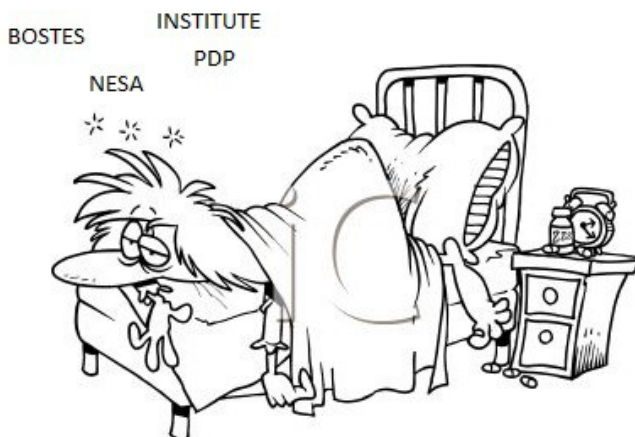
Seeking permanent positions through a central mechanism should be a central component of the next staffing claim, significant business for consideration first now, then into Annual Conference 2018.

In these times of global political volatility, with Australia itself

rotating five Prime Ministers in as many years and NSW 3 Premiers, permanency is an antidote to the dislocation experienced by high needs students from poor, rural and remote backgrounds. The schools which have the greatest needs must not be subject to the greatest casualisation. And now, these students are faced with cuts to penalty rates in their part time jobs (caused by a decision of Fair Work Australia, which was supposedly the ALP's fair-minded alternative to Work Choices). This alone is reason enough for joint union action.

Workload

The “reform” agenda has dramatically increased teacher workload. Credentialling, cyclical curriculum change, audits and PDF sign-offs have all increased workload—for classroom teachers, Head Teachers, Primary APs, Secondary DPs, and Principals. Very little of this has anything to do with improving student outcomes, despite the assertions of snake oil peddlers from Pearson to Kevin Donnelly.



It is worrisome news that psychological injuries are up 32.5%,

and the total payouts has risen 71%. (Audit Office of NSW, 2015-2016). The intersection of increased workload and the fallout as the bottom end of Australian society is left behind is compounding workplace stress for teachers and other social sector workers.

Federation executive should unite members in action to reduce workload. Advice as to how to address the workload of programming from cyclical “reform”, while welcome, is a mere bandaid. The recent article suggesting “meditating” at work, (Teacher Well-being: little things mean a lot’, Education, May 2017) as a remedy for increasing workloads is no alternative to action needed to actually decrease the workload.

Leaving it to a teacher by teacher amelioration, or even a school by school fight buys into the governments “Local Schools, Local Decisions” strategy. We are well placed to centrally challenge this state of affairs when both State and Federal (polling at 45% to Labor’s 55%, Morgan Gallop 2017) governments are in decline . We campaign in the context of a wider community whose eyes are increasingly wide open.

Nonetheless, Turnbull fired off his opening salvo against “teacher efficiency” immediately after ramming his school funding legislation through the Senate. Turnbull, Simon Birmingham and ex minister Christopher Pyne will now be on the offensive over teacher “quality”. Patronisingly, they see it as 'their' territory.

It will be important to keep Labor focussed on resourcing, not “accountability”, especially given Gillard’s initial conditions imposed on funding (see Greg Thompson below).

While we should not accept trade-offs that increase pay in return for workload increases, the removal of unions’ ability to seek work value cases in the IRC has increased the government’s

ability to extract our labour power without recompense.

“New York” and GERM are fairly recognised terms for progressive education theorists. Emerging is perhaps a new term which NSW has sharpened in the Australian context.

“Credentialling, Registration, Accountability, and Measurement”:
“CRAM!”.

Thirty years of neo-liberalism has resulted in a whole new language of “reform” and “productivity”. We are now expected to pay for a check to be certified to work with students, our employer’s “clients”, and another to an authority which once stood for our “standards”, but now for random inspections.

Most of these words are so disliked they explain much of the hostility towards all sections of the political class, from here to America, as well as the propulsion of Jeremy Corbyn’s UK election campaign, with a platform that included standing against such “efficiency dividends”.

Unfortunately, the ALP has been deeply committed to such “reform” since the 1980s era of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating’s privatisation of Telstra, the Commonwealth Bank and Qantas, as well as the wages accord (which saw the biggest transfer of wealth from labour to capital in recent Australian history, and culminated in the trading off of conditions for pay rises under enterprise bargaining).

“Efficiency” and “productivity” are also part and parcel of Julia Gillard’s Gonski “vision”. As Greg Thompson of Queensland University of Technology wrote in 'The Global Education Race-Taking the Measure of Pisa and National Testing' (Sellar, Thompson, Rutkowski):

“Education Act 2013 enshrined in law the goal of the Australian

Education system was to be 'Top 5 by 2025' in PISA. This is an astounding move. Rather than PISA serving to evaluate the policies and processes that have been implemented to deliver quality and equitable education, PISA has become the goal of education policies..... The aim of reversing the trend of declining PISA scores seems to be to improve PISA scores through intensifying those policies that have not worked so far. A bold move.”

Much of the “CRAM” activity we perform today has little to do with students. Rather, it serves an education food chain that extends up through school supervisors, to state bureaucrats, politicians and policy makers who have rarely worked in productive jobs, most likely spending their entire adult lives in a neo-liberal bubble.

Where paperwork does not add to student outcomes, we should not perform it, such as programming outside school hours. Such a position was carried by Annual Conference 2015, until it was rescinded from the front stage the next morning. The fear was that a perceived “ban” could lead to IRC intervention, and the bogey monster of possible union “deregistration” was again wheeled out to frighten the horses. A winged Berijikian government no longer has such an option- if it ever existed.

Organising the breakout

Prior to the recent outbreak over penalty rates and the rise of Sally MacManus to the position of ACTU secretary, former ACTU assistant secretary Tim Lyons delivered a stinging critique on the current state of unions.

In his essay, 'The Labour Movement: My Part In Its Downfall', Lyons argues that the focus on political campaigning has

“effectively excluded core industrial and organising issues”. He adds that, “The most effective way to influence politics and win sustainable gains for workers is to build a social movement that is permanent and independent of the electoral calendar”.



The May 2016 “March against Mike” rally saw 5000 people oppose Council mergers, WestConnex, coal seam gas (CSG) protest laws, and cuts to TAFE & prison educators. Mike Baird resigned December 2016, following the disastrous by-election loss of the seat of 'Orange'.

Lyons also stated:

“There is no future for trade unionism if people experience it as internet memes and random issue phone calling and door knocking about how every election is very likely the end of the world. At best this is palliative care for the union movement: It might make you more comfortable for the end or a miracle, but it’s no cure for the underlying disease. It’s not about rebuilding the power of working people”.

“Each time there is an electoral fight of the sort we saw this year or in 2007, the union movement emerges weaker and more vulnerable, whether Labor wins or loses”, asserted Lyons.

“Industrial relations must be about workers doing better, about rising incomes and better jobs, and the labour movement somehow managed to have very little to say about this. Which left us opposing cuts, loving Medicare and being committed to funding someone called Gonski.”

While the current school staffing agreement is a counter to the drive towards devolution, ongoing job losses in TAFE, prisons, and among non-teaching councillors, increased workload, and the 2.5% wage cap all illustrate a failure to deliver.

With the exception of two “stop work” meetings at the end of 2013 and 2016 called only so as to rubber stamp pre-negotiated 2.5% pay rises, we’ve not taken state-wide industrial action in NSW since June 2012—a half day stoppage in opposition to former Premier Barry O’Farrell’s imposition of “Local Schools, Local Decisions”. 5 year experienced teachers have never felt the strength of united industrial action, rather the atomisation through individual credentialling, merit selection and PDPs.

Active unionism around wages, conditions and cuts must take priority over political campaigning if we are to rebuild our power and influence, as argued by Tim Lyons. This will develop the permanent social movement that delivers permanent positions from the full funding of public schools.

The emerging union collective action around penalty rates, the ABCC and bus service privatisation may recall similarities for more experienced teachers of the 2007 'Your Rights @ Work' rallies and local groups.

It is such collective action that can oust Turnbull and Berejiklian, in much the same way prime Minister John Howard was ousted in the 2007 Federal elections, being only the second sitting Prime Minister to lose his seat (blue ribbon at that!).

Such action can also hold the Labor party to account. Many activists now rue the ending of YR@W groups, deflating our ability to resist Labor's 'Fair Work' Commission, which left intact most of the apparatus of the Liberals 'Work Choices'. As will be explained later, this didn't only affect the blue-collar unions; it came back to bite teachers during the 2010 NAPLAN moratorium, when Gillard faced off with the AEU.

It is also vital that we actively stand up around wider social issues. The formation of Teachers for Refugees, and action around #EducationNotDetention. Now #‘Wear it Red’ days, intersects with the growth of community opposition to the waste of funds on mandatory offshore detention scandals.

Building support for refugees within our communities, alongside Mums for Refugees, and Grandmothers against detention can also help in fostering unity and halting the rise of One Nation and other far right wannabes. The proposed onerous requirements of university level English for migrants is akin to the Band 8 NAPLAN barrier.

Conclusion

Analysis and commentary on the need to understand and reject GERM and the 'New York' model is virtually universal among teacher unions and critical academics. By contrast, there is less agreement about strategies about how to do so. We face a challenge in organising nationally when we have state based employers with varied systems. This became crucial when the rug was pulled out from under the 2010 NAPLAN ban under pressure of fines levied towards teachers in the 'Fair Work' exposed states. There is no coincidence that these are the states which had been driven the furthest down the devolution path- indeed this weakening is GERM's intent.

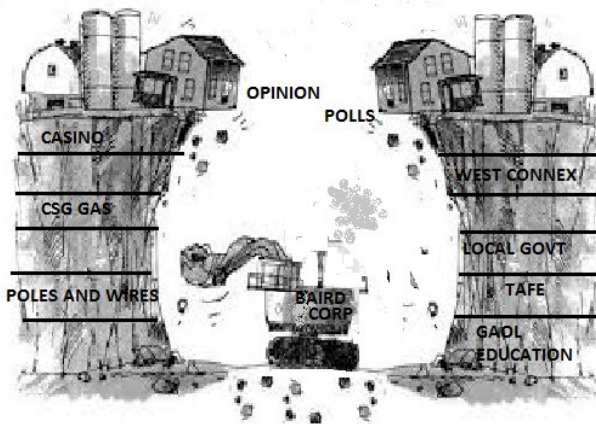
As we stated in 2009:

'Despite the veiled rhetoric of freedom and flexibility, the express purpose of devolution is a strategic attempt at weakening teacher unions. Teachers have successfully composed themselves as employees of a system, and despite being located at thousands of separate sites; this composition has taken the form of a mass organisation of collective industrial power.

Today, the industrial strength of teachers is an anomaly in a world where working people are largely without instruments of collective resistance or social action.

In the same way that dismantling of the mass factory through relocation off-shore, outsourcing and downsizing crippled industrial trade unions, devolution serves to decompose teacher collectivity. Teachers move away from mass, system-wide models of employment to finding themselves atomised in isolated and competing honky tonks (just in time small factories within the globalised production chain, readily closed, casualised and hard to organise)

Today we are well placed to join the breakout. NSW leads the nation's economy, with the NSW State budget \$4.8 billion in surplus. While the media reports the record stamp duty of \$6.8 billion, much of the surplus comes from the capping of public sector workers. The government also plans to increase the public sector dividend from 1.5% to 2%, netting \$23 billion over the next 4 years.

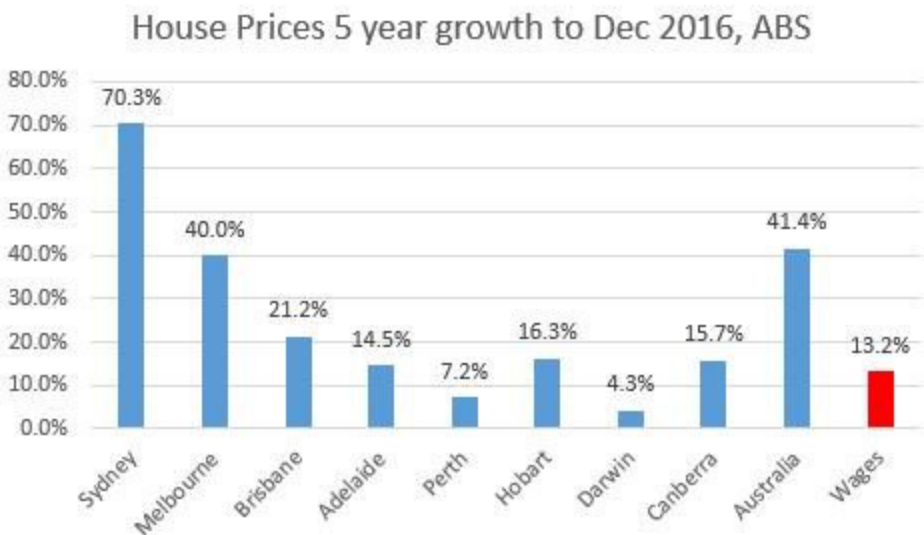


Mike Baird vigorously dug his political hole. Gladys Berejiklian, former Transport Minister, plunges on with more private motorways budgeted and privatisations including the Sydney Fish market site

It is our agency that can see some of the enormous \$70 billion infrastructure budget, mainly for private tollways, diverted to salaries, conditions and social good. Their privatisation of public funds dwarfs their proposed Gonski spending. We are well organised despite the attempts to impose devolution, and as the largest union in NSW, we have a responsibility to lead a push for unified action—as we did in late 2011.

It is now our time to share in the surplus. Despite an annual conference aspiration in 2015 that “Teachers should be able to

live in the communities in which they teach”, teachers increasingly can't afford to do so, with many western Sydney teachers now commuting from the Blue Mountains and as far as the Central Coast. Schemes to finance deposits are one thing, yet salaries have not kept up with housing costs.



Ben Phillips, Twitter, March 20 2017 - The latest ABS stats show house prices soared 70% (13% p.a.) in Sydney in 5 years, while wages went up by just 13% (2.5% per annum)

To this end, some immediate and longer term demands and action should be raised.

As well as their stated position to legislate to return access to the IRC for work value cases, Labor should be pressured to reject the 2.5% wage cap. Our next salary claim should be nearer to 5%. Victorian teachers recently received 3.7%, albeit with trade-offs. However, as stated NSW is booming with the state economy projected to grow at 3.5%. We are only capped at 2.5% if we raise

our hands in agreement to it. Instead we should raise our sights and our expectations.

Shadow Minister Jihad Dib (a former principal, a supporter of Gonski and a vocal opponent of the NAPLAN band 8 rule), should be urged to support class size reduction and a reduction of face to face hours, staffed by permanent positions from increased public school funding. Not enough money? Not in this State budget! There's plenty, with motorways from one end of Sydney to the other. It's time to break out of austerity, and into plenty.

There should be an end to the duplication of credentialling. We must demand that the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) drop the 5-year credentialling cycle report and registered hours, similar to Victoria and Queensland. NSW currently has the most onerous credentialling requirements. The PDP process, which places teacher judgement and collegiality central, should stand alone.

The standards based, performance pay structure should revert to the incremental advancement. Removing the barrier to temporary teacher pay advance was hard won 15 years ago. The trade off in the 2013 salaries deal is a strategic threat to the union, with so many young teachers in temporary positions, especially under equity funding.

UnionsNSW – towards restarting the 2011 IR rallies

The shock win by the “Shooters and Fishers” party of the 2016 Orange by-election demonstrated the crisis encircling the State Conservative government. The Nationals were incensed to lose a country seat, a divide in the coalition that largely explains former Premier Mike Baird’s exit. This also demonstrates the need for unions to get on the front foot well before the 2019 election. In the absence of a progressive movement against the government’s

privatisation agenda, discontent can be expressed and cohered by far-right forces like One Nation. Indeed, they linger to play the role of Tolkien's Gollum, assisting Turnbull and Birmingham to carry their school funding plans on its journey into the senate. Embittered ex PM Tony Abbott feels emboldened to lead an increasingly open mutiny of conservatives within the Liberal party on their own stagger to the right.

Unions NSW should be leading the charge for public sector spending. Joint delegates meetings like the one planned for July 28 are an example of the kind of action that is needed. A move to a militant fight for pay, schools funding and permanency is not just material. It is about how we see ourselves as teachers and workers, and the society we imagine and strive to achieve for ourselves and our students. A colleague recently described how under the pressure of exams, marking and reports, his lessons were "one dimensional".

As the ATN put in 2012: "Teachers in NSW play a key role in developing the unity required to win against the agenda of austerity. The NSWTF is one of the largest and most militant constituencies in UnionsNSW, and as a result has a responsibility to lead. Not only would such unity bring about the possibility of breaking the wage freeze and turning back cuts to workers compensation. It may also prove to provide the grounding to force an end to Local Schools, Local Decisions and to get the market out of education."

Education should be free, fully funded and enlightening, not meagre, measured and miserable. Primary school children should aspire to be astronauts, anxious secondary students shouldn't be driven to breakdown over band 8 barriers, at just 14 years of age.

The choice is now ours, in unity with the breakout against neo-liberal austerity.

The *Activist Teacher Network* aims to build networks amongst public educators in NSW.

We are activist members of the NSW Teachers Federation and see involvement in schools, association meetings, mass meetings, rallies and united action with other unions essential to address workload, break the 2.5% pay cap, and to halt the agenda of privatisation and fully fund public education.

To get involved, visit - [Facebook @ activist teacher network,](#)

or send an email to:
[**treatynow@yahoo.com**](mailto:treatynow@yahoo.com)