

# Bloodied But Unbowed – the effect on NZ secondary school teachers' work and lives of the neoliberal reforms of the 90's – a union perspective

*By Judie Alison, Bronwyn Cross and Rob Willetts (NZPPTA staff members, Wellington, New Zealand)*

## **Abstract**

*This paper presents a picture of a union which has survived throughout the 1990's period of neoliberal reform unprecedented attacks on the pay and conditions of work of its members and on its very existence as a union, and today is in a position of considerable strength. The neoliberal mantra of avoidance of 'provider capture' sought to marginalize and ultimately destroy the capacity of education unions to represent teachers in terms of their working conditions and their professional priorities.*

*The paper brings together evidence from successive negotiating rounds, data assembled by NZPPTA through its regular surveys of its membership, schools and teacher education providers, and information from major campaigns, to create a picture of the issues which education unions have had to confront under neoliberal policies and the strategies which have proved to be effective. It also indicates where the union believes it is positioned now under a government which is beginning to move away from deprofessionalising neoliberal policies to a position of engagement with teachers in the development of future education policies.*

## **Introduction**

The NZ Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) has since 1952 represented teachers in the post-primary sector in New Zealand as “a union of professionals”. Right from its first year of existence, PPTA was negotiating with government on behalf of its members over salaries and conditions (Grant, 2003). At the same time, its representatives served on a wide range of bodies concerned with assessment and qualifications, curriculum, teacher qualifications, school property and the like (Grant, 2003, p.19).

The term “a union of professionals” is used to reflect the two sides of the organisation's work and the tensions between the two. Brown and Angus have provided a definition of professionalism which encapsulates this tension clearly. To them, professionalism is demonstrated by:

- A genuine concern for the welfare of students, particularly those perceived to be disadvantaged by their social background or by the nature of their educational experience
- An active role in the development of curriculum innovation and school improvement
- Collegiate behaviour, including a willingness to share resources and experiences and to support colleagues
- A willingness to take direct industrial action in support of just causes despite the risk of contending with those in authority

- An awareness of the influence of social issues in the discourse of the profession and a willingness to take an active part in that discourse (Brown & Angus, 1997).

Unlike the usual definitions of professionalism, this definition conveys the collaboration which is typical of quality educational environments, and the willingness to take action to achieve improved conditions for their work, conditions whose quality impact significantly on the learning conditions of their students. Unlike many professional groups, teachers are salaried professionals, usually in the employ of the state. They do not have the power to increase fees for their services in order to improve the quality of those services. They have only the power to use their collective strength to persuade the government, either through political action or through industrial action, to increase funding of education in particular directions, such as salaries or class sizes or non-contact time allowances, or to enforce their view of more directly professional matters such as qualifications systems.

## **Impacts of the Neoliberalism of the 1990's**

The key features of neoliberal policies in relation to education have been covered extensively by other writers (e.g. Fiske & Ladd, 2000, Lauder, 1990, Lauder. & Hughes, 1999). For PPTA, the most significant impacts could be identified as follows:

- The concept of 'provider capture' and its deprofessionalising impact which led to exclusion of PPTA from policy forums
- A managerialist approach to teacher quality through compulsory 'performance management' systems, attempts to impose performance pay, imposition of attestation for salary increments through professional standards in the Collective Agreement, and myriad other 'accountability' mechanisms
- Attempts to impose bulkfunding of salaries as part of creating 'self-managing' schools with all responsibility but limited powers
- Successive negotiating rounds in which the government sought to 'claw back' conditions while offering minimal or nil pay increases, accompanied by extreme intensification of teachers' work
- Competition between schools through the abolition of zoning and imposition of market models, leading to extensive inequities of conditions for students and teachers

The PPTA response to all these could be summed up as 'Survive and Regroup', hence the title of this paper, 'Bloodied but Unbowed'.

## **'Provider Capture' and Deprofessionalisation**

Teachers and teacher unions were excluded from policy development through a large part of the 1990's: "Under the New Right notion of 'provider capture', the voice of teachers which had previously been considered essential to educational decision-making became defined as a voice of self-interest which must be excluded in order that decisions which were in the interests of students, parents and the State could be made. School self-management was to be the answer, but this self-management had the main purpose of giving voice to parents and communities, not to teachers (or in fact students)" (Alison, 2003).

## Curriculum and Qualifications Change

A decision of the 1990 PPTA Annual Conference signals increasing concern at exclusion of teachers in the new environment: "That this Association affirms the principle that effective development in curriculum and assessment requires the involvement of teachers" (NZPPTA, 1990). However as the 1990's progressed, that goal was unable to be met. The union was excluded from representation on groups working on development of the new Curriculum and Qualifications Frameworks. Selected teachers were made use of, but the contracting model being used and the government's rejection of the union as the natural voice of teachers meant that direct union representation was absent. The teachers who worked on the developments were employed as individuals, and were there because they were considered to be subject experts. They had no commitment to PPTA policy positions which required that manageability and resourcing must be considered alongside the educational merits of new initiatives. On two occasions, during the 1992/93 CEC round and the 1995/96 CEC round, the union instructed its members to refuse new work on curriculum and qualifications developments, partly in protest at the government's negotiating agenda, but also in protest at the inadequate resourcing of these developments (Alison, 2003).

Curriculum developments of the 1990's can be seen as a technocratic solution to 'teacher-proof' the curriculum. PPTA had taken an active part in the Curriculum Review which reported in 1987, and was generally comfortable with the directions of that Report (Department of Education, 1987). Reactions to the new Minister's *The National Curriculum of New Zealand* in 1991, which became with little change *The Curriculum Framework* in 1993, were relatively muted, but the union's submission makes interesting reading in retrospect. The introduction pointed out that the actual curriculum was what teachers created as a result of their day-to-day decisions, not a piece of paper, and yet the document appeared to ignore that by prefacing all its Principles with the words "The National Curriculum will (or should, or is) ...". The short timeframe for implementation, the assessment requirements, the level of resourcing and managerialist practices were all predicted to militate against teacher buy-in to the new curriculum framework (Capper, 1991). The union's submission concluded that there were major impediments to curriculum reform at that time: "The education system and those that work in it are exhibiting very low levels of energy and low levels of tolerance to additional demands in the wake of a period of continuous and uncertain reform. While the Association is committed to sound and purposeful curriculum change the morale of those charged with implementing it must be a factor considered by those wishing to implement it" (Capper, 1991).

As a result of Executive discussion of this draft submission, last-minute additional recommendations to Annual Conference were agreed and passed unanimously by the 1991 Conference, including the following: "That ... with great reluctance and without passing any judgement on the desirability of the curriculum proposals in total or in particular, empowers the Executive to withdraw all formal Association participation in the development, trialling, implementation, or evaluation of any curriculum and assessment activities connected with or arising from 'School Certificate: A Discussion Document', or 'The National Curriculum for New Zealand', if it is unable to satisfy itself that sufficient staffing and other resources had been made available to implement and continue to deliver them" and "asserts the commitment of teachers to continue to provide a curriculum that is of as high a quality and relevance as resources permit to their own students in their own schools" (NZPPTA, 1990).

The words “without passing any judgement on the desirability of the curriculum proposals in total or in particular” appear to suggest that debate about the merits or otherwise of the curriculum had been overtaken by issues to do with teacher conditions.

The government’s agenda in the Achievement Initiative (the development of national curricula for all the learning areas within the framework set by the overarching document) was revealed at a consultation in February 1992 by Alan Burton, then Manager of Learning and Assessment in the Ministry of Education. According to a report to the Executive by staff member Phil Capper, Burton said that there were three goals for the Achievement Initiative, to:

1. provide classroom-based assessment and monitoring procedures
2. identify the effectiveness of teaching and learning to those who require such information
3. assist in targeting discretionary resources.

It was the second goal which alarmed Capper, and he reported that James Irving, at that time a Ministry staff member, had “confirmed that submissions reflected a proper concern that the document appeared to blur the distinctions between assessment and monitoring procedures. He said the Minister was being lobbied about this” (Capper, 1992). Despite these concerns, even in 1995 the Association was saying to its members in a conference paper about the curriculum and assessment initiatives: “Teachers can, by and large, support them. PPTA policy formed in the past decade has tended to do so” (NZPPTA, 1995a).

PPTA’s reaction to the qualifications reforms was initially positive. The 1991 Annual Conference passed, in response to NZQA’s document *Designing the Framework* (NZQA, 1991), a resolution ‘that a flexible, modular approach to learning be endorsed within a coordinated framework, based on appropriate guidance, in order to ensure that students have access to an integrated course of study’ (NZPPTA, 1991). The text made the comment that teachers already taught in modules or units of learning, and that the Qualifications Framework formalised that but also enabled students to receive credit for parts of courses completed. Continuing what were becoming recurrent themes, however, the writers of the paper commented that “Such a system would have advantages for teachers also, provided that structures continue to permit teacher initiative in curriculum development and delivery. It is important to be aware of the inherent implication for de-skilling teachers, should units of learning be rigidly structured. Equally, teachers must insist on the necessary training and resources to develop and teach units of learning” (NZPPTA, 1991).

Opposition mounted, however, as the details of the Qualifications Framework were revealed. Concerns centred around:

- diversification of subjects and the resulting casualisation of some teachers’ work through being hired on part-time and short-term tenure to cover the broader curriculum
- threats from the tertiary sector as a result of the ‘seamlessness’ of the Framework which made more attractive early movement to tertiary institutions, especially private training establishments
- new resourcing and professional development needs to enable teachers to deliver the new unit standards
- lack of PPTA involvement in any of the development work, with contractors developing each subject’s standards with a reference group which did not include any union representation

- validity and credibility issues, with teachers concerned that consistency of assessment was unlikely to be achieved
- and above all, workload issues.

As noted above, twice during the 1990's the union called on its members within the context of negotiating rounds to refuse to implement the curriculum or qualifications developments. During the first of these bans, from July 1992 to April 1993, NZQA was working towards some key decisions regarding the structure of the Qualifications Framework, in particular a decision that only competency-based assessment (a simple pass/fail model) would be used, despite evidence from their consultation processes that such a position did not have the support of most teachers and schools (Alison, 2003). It could be argued that this decision of NZQA was the final step in their failure to obtain the widespread support of the school sector for unit standard assessment for conventional subjects, and the absence of teachers from participation in policy development at that time may have been a significant factor in such a misjudgment.

A further ban during the 1995/96 negotiating round was lifted when the Collective Employment Contract (CEC) was settled but members were instructed not to implement either the Curriculum or Qualifications Frameworks unless "proper resource provision" was available and only "where a compensatory reduction of workload" was made. Guidelines were produced to help teachers make these judgments.

The impact of these freezes was to establish a pattern of "militant professionalism" (Jesson, 1995) over qualifications throughout the 1990's, through which teachers expressed both their professional anger at educational policies which they found repugnant or at least misguided, and their industrial anger at employment conditions which were impacting severely on their working lives and on the overall health of the profession. This strategy was used again over the NCEA in more recent years, and in every industrial round there are calls for its use. Secondary teachers have learned that it is a way of reminding governments that no educational reform can happen without the co-operation of teachers.

At the same time, PPTA has worked hard to help find solutions to the educational dilemmas which face New Zealand, and qualifications issues are no exception. A decision had been made in 1995 to commission an independent inquiry into the Qualifications Framework, but this did not begin until the ban was lifted in 1996 and reported in July 1997 at PPTA's second Curriculum Conference in Auckland. It established a set of principles by which a qualifications system should be judged, principles which continue to be a useful guide. A paper which was developed in the light of its recommendations was considered at the Annual Conference later that same year. The report of this independent inquiry, *Te Tiro Hou* (NZPPTA, 1997), has been credited by Ministry officials as being the basis of the compromise school qualifications system developed in 1998, called then 'Achievement 2001', now the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA).

This contribution of PPTA to finding a resolution to the conflict was no doubt significant in a change towards a somewhat more consultative and reprofessionalising context towards the end of the 1990's which has continued since then under a new government. After frenetic negotiations behind the scenes during 1998 which did not officially involve PPTA but did involve key

individuals including elected officials, staff and the writers of *Te Tiro Hou* (NZPPTA, 1997), the new qualification was unveiled in November. Step by step the union became involved again, resulting by the end of 1999 in official PPTA membership of the overarching advisory group (known as the Secondary Sector Forum), subject panels and advisory groups, and an unprecedented 'road show' to consult with schools, led jointly by the Ministry and PPTA.

### **Performance Management Systems**

A further area of struggle was over performance management systems which the neoliberal government saw as the appropriate vehicle for improving quality of educational delivery. The union's approach to quality had been one which relied on the interplay between the professional ethic of teachers and government's responsibility to adequately resource the system for its demands. Performance appraisal which was formative in its intention, as part of professional development, had been supported. The PPTA CEC had contained for some years its own version of professional standards, 'Appendix G', which listed the qualities of a competent teacher. The union argued that summative systems fail to achieve the goal of improved performance because they create distrust.

But in a managerialist framework, quality is believed to be achieved by imposing accountability measures, including summative pay-linked performance appraisal. In the 1996 CEC round, PPTA was forced in a hostile negotiating environment to concede that principals would have to attest that teachers complied with Appendix G before they could progress up the salary scale. In the 1999 CEC round the noose was tightened. NZEI in their negotiations, concluded in March 1998, had negotiated an 'entrenchment clause' which entitles their members to receive, in addition to what their own union negotiates, any increases later negotiated by PPTA. The quid pro quo for this was their acceptance of a set of professional standards in their CEC, standards reputedly written by the Industrial Relations wing of the Ministry of Education.

In its own negotiations, PPTA was therefore unable to resist imposition of a similar set of standards, despite the fact that Appendix G (of which there had been no parallel in the NZEI CEC) had served the profession well up to that point. PPTA, on the other hand, managed to negotiate changes to the detail of the standards to make them somewhat more acceptable to its members. Nevertheless, the association of professional standards with pay was anathema to a union committed to ideals of professionalism. Furthermore, the changes had the impact of driving up workloads for middle and senior managers, who had to add these duties to their existing loads. Advice was prepared for branches advocating that they pressure in their schools for a 'light touch' in the application of the professional standards, for example by opposing the development of mechanistic 'performance criteria' to further specify the standards (as advocated by the Ministry of Education in its advice to principals and Boards).

### **Negotiations under a Neoliberal Agenda**

In terms of pay and conditions, secondary teachers suffered considerably less than other unionised workers in the 1990's, though this was at the cost of long and bitter (and at times very risky) negotiations. The union's experience in negotiating under neoliberal governments can be considered under three general headings:

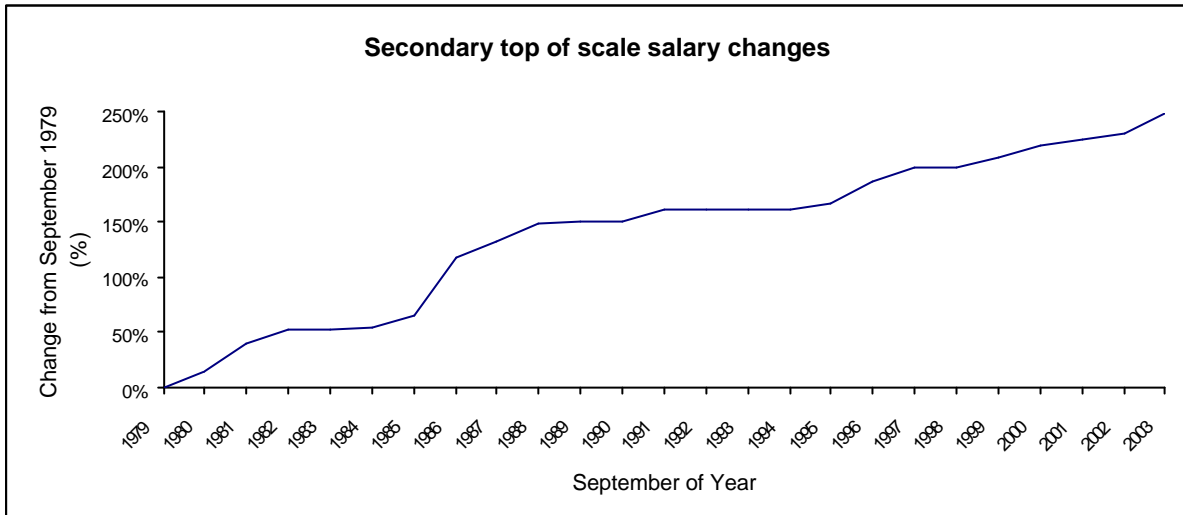
- Salary settlements
- Threats to collective coverage
- Conditions attacks

### Salary Settlements

The two graphs below illustrate actual and real wage changes from 1979 to 2003.

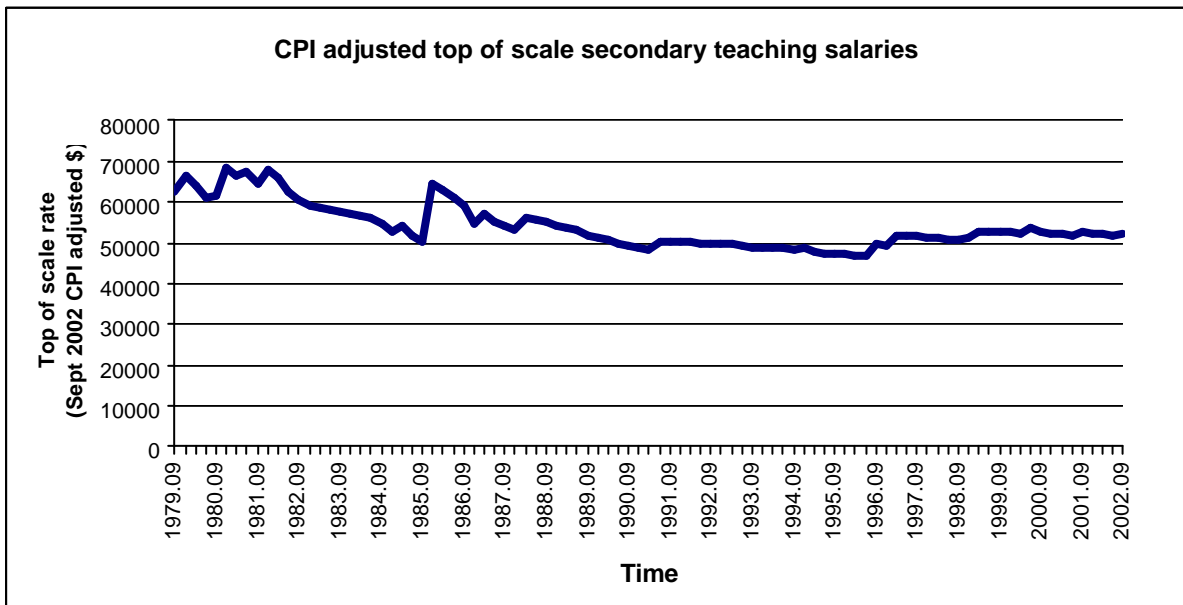
#### **Graph 1 Percentage changes in top of scale salaries**

(PPTA's salary data base)



#### **Graph 2 Changes in purchasing power of top of scale salaries**

(Actual rates adjusted to 2002 vales using CTU's Real Wage Calculator, created by Peter Conway)



The sharpest period of real salary decline actually occurred prior to the New Right taking political ascendancy. During the early 1980's PPTA members had experienced a period of declining wages, associated with the Muldoon government's wage freeze and a general resistance to state sector wage improvements.

The first term of the third Labour government (1984 -1987) brought with it a significant real-terms pay increase. However, this improvement was not sustained and by the end of the second term of that government real wages had fallen to lower levels than under the Muldoon government.

In the first half of the 1990's pay increases were marginal, causing a steady decline in top of scale rates relative to the Consumer Price Index. Costs of teaching salaries were a major issue for the State Services Commission (SSC), which in February 1991 advised their Minister that "We believe that this [bulk funding of salaries] is the only approach that could contain an ever increasing teacher payroll" and "It is a policy that has the potential to bring productivity gains and financial savings" (SSC, 1991a).

In a further report dated 12 April 1991, the SSC advised their Minister: "The general fiscal pressure on Vote: Education to find savings has implications for the schools sector (which spends almost half the Vote, primarily on teacher salaries). The Government had to provide in the Supplementary Estimates, an additional \$85M for teacher salaries, and faces additional costs in the next financial year because of roll increases and the flow on effect of last year's pay settlements. Consequently, the Government will need to determine its priorities in the compulsory sector i.e. whether to save money, to implement a particular management model, to adopt educational policy change etc. " and that "The status quo is untenable because of:

- a) The general fiscal pressure on schools sector expenditure. The central theme of the school sector reviews is that the major scope for savings lies in relation to staffing policies. The Government urgently needs to make key decisions about whether such savings need to be achieved ... centrally or in the context of bulk funding.
- b) Even if the Government does not wish to pursue immediate savings, it would have to address its fiscal vulnerability in terms of the current administrative regime" (SSC, 1991b).

On 14 June 1991 a paper from the Commission advised the Minister that it was "concerned that the Government is fiscally vulnerable in terms of its teacher salary commitments; the present arrangement of giving boards of trustees the employer powers without being responsible for the costs of their employer decisions is untenable." In the same paper SSC suggested that "The introduction of voluntary bulk funding (which at best will involve only a small number of Boards of Trustees) will not resolve the wider question of controlling teacher salary expenditure" (SSC, 1991d).

In 1993, in response to *Furthering the Education Reforms*, a report by the Schools Consultative Group, the SSC stated that "the salaries of teachers are the key cost of the vote education budget, and that devolution of financial control of teacher salaries to BOT will result in control of national finances" (SSC, 1993).

Within this environment of intended cost cutting and transfer of fiscal risk to schools through the bulk funding/individual contract mechanism, winning salary increases was a major difficulty.

In the early 1990's relatively small salary increases were accepted after industrial activity, as the union focussed heavily on maintaining existing terms and conditions and securing collective contract coverage. This led to growing wage demands amongst the membership and increasing militancy.

Throughout the 1990's recruitment and retention provided the basic argument for PPTA's salary claims. Staffing cuts in 1991 helped mask the growing secondary teacher shortage, but pressure on supply was increasingly evident from the end of 1994 and from October 1995 onwards a series of PPTA staffing surveys showed systemic problems in recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified teaching staff.

In 1995 PPTA lodged a 21% pay claim. The government responded with an offer of 2% on all rates and a further 1% in performance-linked pay. Schools began the 1996 year short of 250 teachers (PPTA Education Gazette database) and over 400 overseas teachers had to be used to fill the gaps (Ministry of Education, 1997). Denial of staffing problems by government is a traditional response to supply difficulties, but the magnitude of the deficit in 1996 could no longer be dismissed by the government. With an election looming, massive industrial unrest and the exposure of significant staffing shortages in secondary schools, the government agreed to a settlement which gave a 12.5% increase to secondary teachers.

From 1996 the trend of declining real salaries was reversed, with further quite significant salary improvements in the context of the times. Partly these were the outcome of ongoing and intensifying secondary teacher shortages which the National-led governments could not hide from the public, partly they resulted from the impacts of teacher militancy, and partly they reflected the unstable electoral position in which the National Coalition governments found themselves.

Consequently, while unable to achieve the real salary rates of the early 1980s, secondary teachers were able to sustain salary rates with greater success than much of the population under neoliberal governments. (Gross salary rates are one part of the equation. Net salary rates change was influenced by tax rates. Direct tax rates fell over the period and indirect taxes went through a series of changes, e.g. GST was introduced. In the same period the ability to claim tax rebates for work-related costs, previously much used by secondary teachers, disappeared.)

### **Threats to collective coverage**

While wages fell under Muldoon there was little in the way of outright attack on the collective itself. The State Sector Act 1987 required PPTA to codify its conditions into an award or collective contract. A long and tortuous process, it nevertheless established secondary teacher salaries and conditions within a secure framework that subsequently had to be changed through industrial negotiation. The State Sector Act 1987 also removed arbitration as a solution to industrial impasse.

However the whole ethos of the neoliberal approach to industrial relations was anti-collective and within education Treasury promoted, through Tomorrow's Schools, individual contracts in a bulk-funded environment.

Reducing education expenditure, the transfer of 'fiscal risk' from government to individual schools, and the introduction of the 'market model' into secondary

education all required the breakdown of the national collective contract and the use of site (or preferably individual) contracts. These aims were (poorly) concealed within a rhetoric of 'greater flexibility' or 'more local decision making'. In pursuing this agenda the Treasury and State Services Commission showed themselves to be more than merely public servants neutrally implementing government policy; they were active players in promoting and driving policies which were anathema to the wider New Zealand community.

In the 1988/89 round the SSC pursued individual employment contracts with unholy vigour. PPTA members mounted significant industrial action in order to drive back the threat to the collective. However, following settlement principals were removed from collective coverage and placed on individual contracts by legislative fiat.

In 1992 (the 1990 Award round having been settled quickly in the year of an election the Labour government was looking likely to lose) the SSC initially refused to negotiate a collective contract. This was the first negotiation round under the Employment Contracts Act. There was a real concern in the union that the power the Act gave the government would cause it to promulgate individual employment contracts (IECs) and simply walk away from collective bargaining. In the event, when the collective expired members simply refused to sign IECs and sat on their existing terms and conditions for nine months until a new collective employment contract was negotiated.

Thereafter threats of IECs, while always a component of the industrial planning, were no longer viewed with trepidation. PPTA knew that it could sit out the government and that the membership would be solid in their refusal to move out of collective coverage. This did not stop the SSC from seeking alternatives.

Interestingly, governments that used the rhetoric of freedom of choice seemed perpetually enraged when individuals elected to use that right to choose to operate in a collective. The government was even opposed to freedom of choice for employers if this risked the government's cost-cutting agenda. On 11 June 1991 the SSC reported to Bill Birch that: "There is unlikely to be widespread take up of bulk funding in the best of circumstances, and even less under a winners and losers approach" and "... considerable thought needs to be given to the implementation strategy, in particular the public relations and information approach" (SSC, 1991c).

Five years later, in the 1996 Audit Report on the Ministry of Education, written by officials of the Ministry of Education and the SSC, those officials were still reporting that "Many boards have expressed reluctance to accept site based bargaining because of lack of skill, lack of resourcing to employ skilled help, fear of highly skilled and well resourced teacher unions, concern at possible future budget cuts and reluctance to jeopardise staff relationships." Yet they were still pressing ahead, stating " ... until the vision of self management in Tomorrow's Schools is realised in the form of full bulk funding, it is in fact the Government, not schools, that makes most of the trade-offs between education inputs, including property" (Laking, 1996).

Despite acknowledging bulk funding would be unpopular the Commission and the government continued to attempt to foist it onto the sector, and in 1997 they claimed an opt-out clause for bulk funded schools which would have removed teachers in those schools from collective coverage. Again, this was absolutely rejected by the PPTA membership.

### **Conditions attacks**

In 1983 teachers were working an average of 48.09 per week (Department of Education, 1983). By 1995 the average was 50.58 hours per week (Bloor, 1995), with increased administration and classroom contact and reduced levels of professional development and extracurricular hours as components. In 2000 the average had increased again to 52 hours (PPTA Membership Survey, 2000).

From 1990 to 2000 there were three sets of staffing cuts in secondary schools – 1991, 1994 and 1999, collectively wiping approximately 1000 FTTE positions from secondary schools. This drove up average class sizes and increased class contact hours for classroom teachers and for many middle and senior managers. (A 25% reduction in the 'preparation time' component of the staffing formula of the Secondary Schools Staffing Orders in Council for 1991 immediately removed over 200 full-time teacher equivalents (FTTE) from secondary schools. The reduction funded the anticipated costs of the bulk funding trial. The introduction of the Ministerial Reference Group unified staffing formula in 1994 removed over 600 positions from secondary schools. It also established inferior staffing levels than the old formula would have generated when senior rolls increased after the school leaving age was increased in 1995. The introduction of Special Education 2000 saw the cutting in 1999 of over 90 secondary teaching positions, which were replaced by the non-teaching RTLB positions across both primary and secondary schools.)

By 1996 60% of secondary teachers indicated they wanted to leave the profession (NZPPTA, 1996). Even after a 12.5% salary increase, by 1997 54% were still considering leaving teaching (NZPPTA, 1997), most commonly because of excessive workload, high stress, deteriorating student behaviour, the wish to improve their quality of life, or frustration with the growing range of tasks unrelated to teaching duties. They identified as the key factors the workload intensification arising from increased compliance and administration demands, increase in student-related problems, loss of non-contact time, and the workload associated with the new Curriculum Framework developments.

The workload pressures were undermining secondary teacher retention. Teachers asked for defined minimum non-contact hours, more resourcing for schools, and additional ancillary support to help control their growing workloads. In response PPTA sought staffing increases and contact controls in its claims from 1995 onwards.

Ideas of controlling teacher workload did not sit well with the governments of the time, which argued, partly from the theoretical basis of maximum employer flexibility, that such matters were best left to the discretion of the local employer. There was also a desire amongst the government and its officials to strip back secondary teacher conditions, at the same time as imposing further compliance, audit and monitoring requirements onto teachers through the collective employment contract. More importantly, addressing workload required the state to reverse its practice of cutting staffing numbers and to carry the subsequent costs this implied.

Successive governments refused to negotiate improved non-salary conditions. In fact, in the 1988/9 award round the government claims had been for the removal of a wide range of conditions, as well as the removal of national standards of performance and discipline, which were to be left to local decision making. Industrial action pushed these claims back though the settlement

included some minor concessions on conditions and the acceptance of a lower salary increase than PPTA had claimed.

In 1995 PPTA lodged a claim for salary improvements and for workload relief through additional staffing and student contact hour maximum controls. The government again refused to begin to negotiate until all non-salary claims were removed from the table. The 1996 settlement contained no staffing or workload relief.

In October 1997 PPTA lodged a claim for both salary improvements and for workload relief through additional staffing and contact controls. The government again refused to negotiate on any non-salary claims. The settlement in June 1999 contained a 7% salary increase, with the requirement for attestation of ongoing competence before teachers could progress to each step on the salary scale. There were no workload reduction measures agreed. Not until the 2001/02 negotiations was it possible to negotiate workload relief through collective employment negotiations.

### **Collective Coverage Critical**

Between the election of the third Labour government that brought the New Right to political power and the election of the fourth Labour government that changed the political landscape, PPTA members managed to maintain collective coverage, to hold their real salary levels, to retain most of the conditions which they had had at the start of the era and to resist most of the changes the neoliberals had sought to impose on the workforce through the collective employment contract negotiations. The maintenance of the collective ensured that the worst excesses of the neoliberals could not be advanced in our schools and secondary teachers remained a strong and unified force in protecting the state funded, national education system.

Balanced against these successes, the sector suffered significant staffing reductions and failed to win new staffing or workload controls and in fact experienced ever-increasing workload demands. In addition, the secondary sector suffered an unacceptable and unnecessarily high loss of experienced and effective teachers, systemic secondary teacher shortages, and long and debilitating industrial conflicts that drew the focus of teachers away from the delivery of education in the classroom.

In hindsight, the 1996 settlement marked the end of the real threat from the neoliberals, though the key to the union's success can be dated back to 1992 when, at the height of the New Right's influence, the Government failed to break the determination of PPTA members to remain within a collective.

### **Bulk Funding and Teacher Professionalism**

Secondary teachers instinctively understood the link between a national collective agreement and bulk funding which is why they were prepared to accept lower pay increases as a trade-off for retaining collective coverage.

As indicated earlier, secondary teachers held their first strike under the Employment Contracts Act on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1992. It was a courageous challenge to an Act which aimed to weaken unions by empowering the employer to bypass unions and offer improved terms and conditions to members via an individual employment contract. Photographs of the rallies accompanying the strike show

banners variously supporting the collective agreement and scattered amongst them were anti-bulk-funding messages.

For those whose political instincts were less acute, the Government had provided a trial run for bulk funding in the form of bulk-funded day relief. Schools had been made responsible for funding their own day relief in the 1991 budget. By the winter of 1992, it was clear to many schools that the funding was insufficient to cover the costs with the result that they began refusing requests for leave and/or asking teachers to cover for absent colleagues. Thus the government had provided an object lesson in bulk funding which demonstrated that responsibility would be devolved without requisite funding and teachers would be required to work harder to cover the shortfall.

It would be wrong though, to assume that teachers' opposition to bulk funding was driven solely by self-interest or, as has sometimes been claimed, by the desire of the union to preserve its own power gained through the bargaining of the collective agreement. What is missing from this analysis is the recognition of the powerful professional commitment teachers have to each other and to secondary education generally. The definition of professionalism referred to earlier in this paper identifies that teachers are bound together by, among other things, a belief in the importance of equal educational opportunity regardless of student background, informed understandings about the impact of social and economic factors on learning and a shared belief in the importance of collegiate behaviour. Bulk funding offended against all these principles.

In the first place, teachers could see that bulk-funding and the introduction of either site-based or individual agreements would allow schools in wealthier areas to pay more and offer better conditions. thus advantaging themselves in the recruitment stakes. They could also compound the advantage by employing extra teachers. This was clearly going to enhance the range and quality of education available at wealthier schools. The initial bulk-funding formula promised to widen this disparity because it was set at the rate of an average salary which meant schools with younger teachers profited ("winner schools") while schools with a large number of teachers who were at the top of the scale would have had to lay-off teachers ("loser schools"). In practice, this was often low-decile and rural schools because years of falling rolls meant they had had to shed staff which tended to disproportionately affect younger teachers. Emeritus Professor Ivan Snook summed up the feelings teachers had about this state of affairs when he said: "Bulk funding is not a financial decision but a moral one. Constant talk of winner/loser schools is a disgrace. We are not talking about customers in restaurants but about our children" (NZPPTA, 1995b).

The second factor that underpinned teachers' opposition to bulk funding was the impact that the individualistic and competitive model that it was ushering in would have on professional integrity and collegiality. Fundamentally, the model sought to replace the allegiance teachers had to the profession with a more direct loyalty to their individual employer, the board of trustees. Theoretically, they were supposed to see themselves as in competition for "clients" against other schools and other teachers.

Interestingly, the allegiances seemed to go the other way. Boards of Trustees, seeing teachers work close at hand, were more inclined to support their cause than the government's. There was also widespread community mistrust of the government's motives. Those boards which supported bulk funding often found

that they were not only at odds with their teachers but were also isolated from their own community.

Competition was to be internal as well as external, with performance pay backed up by summative appraisal, providing the spur. Implied in all this was a significant change to the culture of the staffroom. For secondary teachers, the professional ethic includes acting as advocates for their students on occasions. In most New Zealand staffrooms educational, political and administrative strategies are hotly contested. In a subtle way the managerialist, bulk funding culture exerted a control over these activities. In a Ministry of Education commissioned report into bulk funding, teachers were asked what activities were no longer possible at their school under bulk funding. The response given by one of the teachers was: "Open frank discussions during staff meeting since teachers are scared of jeopardising their chance of promotion, getting other jobs or even losing their jobs. You only say things that are not controversial and things that you know are what they are receptive to" (Hawk & Hill, 1994, p.42).

Outside the school, there was occasional evidence of a more sinister neo-liberal agenda with respect to freedom of speech. At one time Roger Kerr, as spokesperson for the Business Roundtable questioned the appropriateness of schools studying Victorian novelists such as Charles Dickens because such books gave a negative view of capitalism, and in 1995 the then Minister of Education Lockwood Smith sought a rewrite of the social studies curriculum to "tone down some of the politics" (Evening Post, 1995). For teachers, these were signals that under a fully bulk-funded system, professional judgement would soon be replaced with more deliberate ideological controls.

Although the most enduring image of PPTA's opposition to bulk funding is probably that of industrial action, there was a sense in which this activity reinforced collaboration. The strikes against bulk funding occurred at a school level and were "wildcats", in other words they were organised without the approval of the PPTA Executive. Whenever individual branches took industrial action they were bolstered by support from members throughout the country. This took the form of faxes which arrived in the school throughout the day and night, turning what was an isolated act into collective action. Such activity was dismissed by the Association of Bulk Funded Schools as calling on "blind adherence and loyalty typical of a union mentality which has no place in the modern world" (The Dominion, 1997). This comment overstates the significance of industrial relationship between teachers while failing to appreciate the sense of professional community that binds teachers together.

## **The Union Today**

With the ebbing of the neoliberal tide, PPTA's goal is to return to the role of 'militant professionals' it has occupied for most of its history, hopefully in a state which recognises that teachers are essential partners in any educational enterprise.

There is a commitment to rebuilding the professional side of the union after a time in which survival on the industrial front has taken almost our entire energy:

- Staff tasks in the National Office have been restructured to ensure that at least one person is responsible for solely professional matters

- Information is being collected on members' professional expertise as an essential source of advice
- A redeveloped website is being used to enhance the union's professional as well as its industrial capacity
- The union has developed its own process, titled 'Charting the Future', to envision the next 20 years of secondary education in order to be able to participate in partnership with the government's 'Secondary Futures Project'
- Networks are being built with academics, professional groups, other educational agencies to establish our credibility on professional matters

However the industrial struggles continue, and the union must continue to commit a substantial proportion of members' contributions towards the core issues of salary and conditions. While Ministry officials repeat as a mantra that 'We are now in a high trust environment', this rings hollow. Accountability mechanisms developed under neoliberalism persist and in fact are being increased through the Planning and Reporting initiative; the Ministry's change management processes have improved only slightly; secondary teachers' workloads continue to be excessive, with the requirements of the NCEA exacerbating the situation; the current Ministry focus on the teacher as the key variable in student achievement poses both threats and opportunities.

There has been damage done to the collective culture of secondary teachers. Bulk funding along with other policies such as the abolition of zoning have reinforced the individualistic, competitive culture in opposition to the professional collective culture. There is now a deeper division between those teachers comfortably ensconced in high-decile, ex-bulk funded schools and those in lower socio-economic areas where they Maori and Pacific Islands students tend to congregate. The former group no longer seem to see themselves as part of the national network of schools. They left bulk funding behind only with reluctance, lobbied for special protections for their own children when zoning was re-introduced and are offering overseas qualifications in opposition to the NCEA. (Section aaF(d) of the Education Act specifically identifies children of board employees as a priority group for entry into "desirable" schools.)

In spite of the union's best efforts, New Zealand is now fostering an ersatz private system within the state system. Nowhere is this more apparent than in community reactions to school reorganisations; mergers between high and low decile schools are largely unacceptable to parents now as result of the racial and class polarisation that has occurred since 1989. The ideal of genuinely comprehensive schools which PPTA members have nurtured since 1952 is still under threat.

## Bibliography

- Alison, J. (2003) 'Unravelling the professional and industrial', *Delta* 55 (1 & 2) pp.113-125
- Bloor, D.J. (1995) *The Workloads of Secondary School Teachers: A National Survey*, Palmerston North: Massey University Education Research and Development Centre

- Brown, L. & Angus, L. (1997) 'Reconstructing Teacher Professionalism in Victoria's Schools of the Future', *ACSA Curriculum Perspectives* 17(1)
- Capper, P. (1991) Draft Submission on the Discussion Document 'The National Curriculum of New Zealand', NZPPTA Files
- Capper, P. (1992) 'Hui on the National Curriculum of New Zealand 20/21 February', NZPPTA Files
- Department of Education (1983) *Report of the Secondary School Staffing Working Party*, Wellington: Department of Education
- Department of Education (1987) *The Curriculum Review: Report of the Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools*, Wellington: Government Printer
- Evening Post (1995), 'Curbs Possible on Political Teaching', July 4 1995
- Fiske, E.B. & Ladd, H.F. (2000) *When Schools Compete: A Cautionary Tale*, Washington DC: The Brookings Institution Press
- Grant, D. (2003) *Those Who Can Teach, A History of Secondary Education in New Zealand from the Union Perspective*, Wellington: Steele Roberts
- Hawk, K. & Hill, J. (1994) *Evaluation of Teacher Salaries Grant Scheme Trial: The Third Year*, Wellington: Ministry of Education
- Jesson, J. (1995). *The PPTA and the state: From militant professionals to bargaining agent: A study of rational opportunism*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Auckland
- Laking, R. (1996) *Management Audit of Ministry of Education*, Wellington: Government Printer
- Lauder, H. (1990) 'The New Right Revolution', in Middleton, S., Codd, J. & Jones, A. (eds.) *New Zealand Education Policy Today: Critical Perspectives*, Wellington: Allen & Unwin
- Lauder, H. & Hughes, D. (1999) *Trading in Futures: Why Markets in Education Don't Work*, Buckingham: Open University Press
- Ministry of Education (1997) *Monitoring Teacher Supply, Survey of Staffing in New Zealand Schools on 30 January 1997*, Wellington: Ministry of Education
- NZPPTA (1990) *Annual Conference Paper: Curriculum Policy for the 1990s*, Wellington: NZPPTA
- NZPPTA (1991) *Annual Conference Paper Te Ara ki te Hau Tau Hou – Pathway to the New Century*, Wellington: NZPPTA
- NZPPTA (1995a) *Annual Conference Paper: The Frameworks: Braided Stream or Tangled Web?* Wellington: NZPPTA

NZPPTA (1995b) 'SBF – The Fight Continues', *PPTA News*, November 1995

NZPPTA (1996) *Teacher Intention Survey*, Wellington: NZPPTA

NZPPTA (1997) *Te tiro hou: Qualifications framework inquiry*, Wellington:  
NZPPTA

NZPPTA (1997) *Teacher Intention Survey*, Wellington: NZPPTA

NZQA (1991) *Designing the Framework*, Wellington: NZQA

SSC (1991a) Paper to Minister of State Services, 22 February

SSC (1991b) Paper to Minister of State Services, 12 April

SSC (1991c) Paper to Minister of State Services, 11 June

SSC (1991d) Paper to Minister of State Services, 14 June

SSC (1993) Letter to the Schools Consultative Group, July 9

The Dominion (1997), 'Crusade against Bulk Funding 'dishonest'', 27 November  
1997