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**SENSITIVE:** Personal

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Identifier	Name	Role
<b>Bold Content:</b>	<b>Clive Haggard, Researcher</b>	<b>Interviewer</b>
Plain Content:	Warren Lee, Former Senior Officer	Interviewee

### Start of Transcript

#### File 1 of 1

**It's 14 October 2020, I'm meeting with Warren Lee. Warren was an organiser with the Australian Education Union, and then secretary 2IC working with me particularly in the 1990s and 2000s. Warren went on to a successful career in industrial relations, but was involved both as a member and an officer in a crucial period of our history.**

**So, Warren thanks very much for agreeing to meet with me today and giving us your thoughts. I was wondering if we could begin firstly with a description of how you came to be a teacher in the ACT.**

Yes, well thank you Clive. I arrived in Canberra as a young teacher in January 1978, as I'd recently married a South Australian woman who was a Commonwealth Teaching Service scholarship holder and was appointed to a school in Canberra. So, I arrived here in 1978 unemployed, after two years teaching in a South Australian high school where I'd done my original degree. The first thing I did when I arrived was to go to the old ACTTF office in the

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Woden tower, and my first contact was Keith Lawler, who was then the president of the union, and he signed me up as an unemployed teacher member.

Shortly thereafter I was approached to do some casual teaching of a night at the CIT, the old Canberra TAFE College. And then shortly thereafter in March 1978 I commenced teaching at Watson High School where I worked in the humanities area.

**So, Watson High School of course had a very notable history in the union in terms of the struggles to keep the school open, and then issues around asbestos contamination. But before we get into a more detailed discussion about that, you were at Watson initially as a branch representative on council. And then from Watson, can you just outline your career that led you to becoming an officer of the union?**

I went to Watson High School and it was obvious right from the start that it was a school that was experiencing significant enrolment decline. It geographically lacked the advantage of the two nearby high schools, Campbell High School near the war memorial, and Lyneham High School which is very conveniently located just off Northbourne Avenue. At the time the principals of both Campbell and Lyneham were well aware of their geographic advantage and were also quite happy to engage in what clearly was predatory enrolment behaviour. They made no bones about it, even though they knew they were directly impacting on the future of a school which did not have this geographic advantage, was already getting some notoriety amongst parents as a declining school, and the fact that they were their fellow unionists and fellow professional colleagues, didn't bother those principals one little bit.

**The irony of that situation of course was that Watson High School had only opened in 1965 so it was still a relatively new piece of infrastructure. But of course, planning in Canberra during the '70s had been very substantially disrupted by the attitude of the Fraser government towards Canberra and growth in the city actually declined, I think at one stage where population went backwards. And Watson – I mean, you might find it amusing these days with Gungahlin sitting to the north, and all the rural developments that took place in New South Wales, Watson was, as you outlined was geographically isolated.**

Yes.

**So what was it like in that environment as a teacher? Was there a siege mentality in the school?**

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Well, there was a siege mentality and I particularly was aware of it because after being there for either 12 months or two years, I became a compulsory transfer, and left the school for a few months and worked in the ACT Schools Authority where I took some interest in the staffing area, which I'll come back to, and for a short period worked in the Authority office with Ray Gunn, and Don Brooker, and Pat Garnett, all notables of the time. And I then moved on, happy to return to Watson High School, because there was a camaraderie amongst the staff, and the kids were – well, if you like they were a rough and tumble bunch of kids, they were lovely kids, and I enjoyed teaching that age group. I never took an interest in teaching college aged students compared to that age group.

But nevertheless, there was always the shadow, each year we went through compulsory transfer stuff and that caused great unhappiness in the staff. There was always a stigma for compulsory transfer teachers, one which I was mindful of until I left the union in 2000 because I'd been a compulsory transfer three times. First of all in 1980, and then when I was on exchange in 1983 and the 1982 school closure decision was reversed. Arthur Wilkes, the newly appointed principal said that he couldn't maintain that level of staffing for 1984 and declared me a compulsory transfer during 1983, but by the time I'd returned there was scope for me to stay at the school. Finally a compulsory transfer again when the school closed forever at the end of 1987.

**Arthur, I think, was, from what I understand, given instructions by the employer to work towards the closure of the school, and being the sort of individual he was found that very difficult to deal with, and much to the annoyance of the Schools Office, as it then was.**

Yes, Arthur – who I've recently had coffee with, and he's 87 and still plays table tennis – Arthur, I think was appointed after Susan Ryan decided the school should be – so my memory is the school should close and immediately the Canberra community took that on as confirmation of what many of them knew was already happening, that the school was dying. It was then decided it would close. There was then a political decision made after the Hawke government was elected in March 1983. I was overseas on teacher exchange, a program that no longer exists, unfortunately, a bit of history gone, very valuable for teachers. I encouraged everybody I knew who was interested in working overseas. I still think one of the best things that Christine and I ever did, I still reflect on it. So, a decision for it to continue past 1983 was made while I was away.

**There was a part of the campaign promise of the prime minister to be, Bob Hawke, in that he said that he would allow the continuation of the development of Radford College, but**

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**the sweetener for the public sector was to be the reopening, because the decision had to be made to close it, the continued operation of Watson High.**

That is right. And the principal of the closing school, Frank McGinity, who died several years ago, was at that point in his career where he had neither the desire nor the capacity to try and reinvigorate the school. So Arthur was appointed, great personality, very good with people, and the public, but unfortunately I don't think – well, I'm sure – that the prospective parent interest was always dampened by the fact that the school had been closed once. And frankly, privately many of us thought that it could never get back from that.

My memory is in 1984 we had a very good Year 7 enrolment, there was a sense of excitement about it. There had been a new principal appointed, a new deputy principal, the now deceased John Keneally. Some of the old guard had generally moved on because they wanted to. I wanted to stay there. Arthur put me in a role where I was particularly focused on liaising with the primary schools. I was seen as somebody who was comfortable out working with those schools. I've got to be frank, particularly on reflection, it was difficult to maintain the enthusiasm because you met so much negativity about what would happen to the school. Yes, the government reopened it, yes Susan Ryan as the Minister, was very enthusiastic, and I remember her visiting the school. I don't remember the mechanics of it but she certainly came and visited. Some prominent people put their kids there, David Coombe, ex ALP secretary enrolled his son there.

So, there was this real sense in '84 of a positivity, but of course Lyneham was still busy being predatory, Campbell was happy trying to grab the kids, Gungahlin was still a pipe dream. So, we were out canvassing the local primary schools. Some of our feeder primary schools would never admit it but there were individual teachers encouraging parents not to send their kids to Watson.

**Now at the same time there were primary schools around the Territory that were under threat, and there was a lot of debate in the union about the correct policy as to whether or not – an absolutely no closures policy was appropriate in those circumstances. And we wound up down the track with a policy that basically focused on educational needs and a recognition that in some circumstances closure might be necessary because of changing demographics. But just to move on fairly quickly on this subject, is why the union ultimately recognised that there were alternatives to school closure, or site closure with an amalgamation process. And we had, for example, with the creation of the Melba Copeland arrangement. We had in Ginninderra High School, the Big G as it once was, closed with Holt and Higgins Primary Schools being amalgamated with it to create the new Southern Cross K-10, or preschool to Year 10 school.**

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**So, there were, I think, significant attempts, and successful attempts in creating new models of education. Another one comes to mind is the Lyons preschool to Year 2 early childhood school. But nevertheless, what you've outlined is a fairly traumatic experience teaching in that kind of environment, and of course it triggered significant debates over time within the union. And also a degree of hostility with the P&C, Parents and Citizens Association, who were still committed for many years to a no school closures at all policy.**

I always took the view that, as a young teacher right through to leaving my role in the union in 2000, that our primary focus was keeping public education, strong and robust and vital, but alongside it, the welfare of teachers. I observed firsthand that principals and deputy principals particularly, faced personal pressure about the fact their enrolment was declining. There were models in the town where positive amalgamation created a far better school for the kids and the teachers.

The one I always focus on, even though my wife by this stage had left Fisher Primary School, and Waramanga Primary School, where you could see the buildings from one another. They amalgamated with parental support to become Arawang Primary School. I have never met anybody who said that Arawang school was lesser than the two. In fact, it was always said that Arawang was a better school than Waramanga and Fisher became as they declined. And the reason is because the enrolment pressures had gone, there was only one school. The parents got behind it and Arawang to this day is a very robust, healthy primary school. And I saw that happening in the '80s and as a union officer – well, as a union activist, as a council member, as a union officer, I always looked, as our former president Rosemary Richards did, to Arawang. Rosemary was personally involved in the creation of Arawang and always saw that it didn't have to be detrimental to public education or the ACT budget, or the members she was responsible to.

I've always been happy to argue that case publicly. The P&C have not always agreed with that position. I think the struggle that individual principals and teachers exercised in trying to keep their threatened schools open was never tenable – the cost benefit analysis, not just money, professional anguish, the benefits were not there. I always thought the kids were better in a more vibrant amalgamated school.

**Ironically of course for Watson what finished its operation off as a high school was the discovery of asbestos in the infrastructure at the school, and eventually of course the enrolments there collapsed and the school was closed. It became a CIT campus for a while and it's now a private college for teaching media.**

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I wonder if it will be knocked down, because of asbestos. There's still some residual asbestos.

**Yes, that's a real possibility. After your role at Watson you're then in a situation of coming into the union office as an organiser. Do you want to talk about that transition from being a classroom teacher into a fulltime role in the union office?**

And something I did, which was important to me, seeing a sort of more holistic view, apart from school closures, asbestos etc, was that in 1984 I was the union representative on the level one staff transfer round. That was a baptism of system fire for me in terms of staffing and looking after individual members' welfare.

**Do you want to comment in detail about that process?**

Look I could talk about it for another three hours, you do not have that time. It was interesting because the level one staffing panel that year had three men on it so we involved a union member, I can't think of her name, delightful woman, who joined us as an ex officio, even though Ian Collier, Ralph Tabor and I, I think, would be seen as very much the champion of all of our members. The college principals were a very formidable group and that was to manifest later in my union career. Even then they were very, very focused on thinking that the best people to decide who should teach at their college was them as individuals. I could name some names, and I'd be happy to. They were fiercely ambitious for their colleges. The problem for them was that there was a very, very robust college principal on the panel, a man who I still hold in the highest regard, Ian Collier.

**Yes, a man of significant integrity.**

A man of significant integrity, particularly given that he came to Canberra to be, as I understand it, to be principal of Stirling College, from Geelong Grammar, and transitioned to public education in Canberra. He was a fierce advocate for public education but he was also a fierce advocate for some equity amongst staff who were battling to get jobs in colleges. In my view unfortunately high school staff have always seen that it was a promotion to work in a college. It is not a view I shared, it's a view that I took right through to the end in the AEU office and beyond, suffered some loss of skin about it. I faced very angry meetings as union secretary from college staff who knew that my views on mobility were very clear, that somehow or other, there were always more high school teachers than there were college teachers, and somehow or other for the high school group who held the misplaced view a college was the place to work, there had to be some equity about how that happened. The union office, including the other officers at the time, Rosemary

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Richards, Clive Haggart, Margaret Wada, Audrey Duke, we ourselves had robust discussions ourselves about it. It was probably an area where Clive and I had some disagreements.

**Well of course the union during that time took a view that a secondary teacher was a secondary teacher and that there ought to be some limited term arrangements to enable people to experience both opportunities.**

Correct. And so even right back in 1984 I had some celebrated battles which would come back to bite me. When I came in as a union organiser in 1990 a couple of those college principals were still there and they remembered. And for a little while there a little bit of negotiation had to go on about my work in those schools; because Ian Collier and I frankly had stood the line to the point where a couple of our recommendations to the delegate were argued at the Chief Executive level by the college principals.

**You'd understand from your experience there of course amongst the sorts of problems that were faced were job descriptions that people were meant to write to, which deliberately targeted specific individuals that the principals wanted to recruit from even outside of the system.**

Yes.

**One notable one that got some publicity at the time was a physics, chemistry, biology, outdoor education, farm mechanics model that was held up as an example of a job in that case for a favoured external applicant, and there was a mighty battle on the selection panel about that. But the underlying theme was that the union was going into these arrangements with a view as to systemic integrity and the entitlement of members to fair and appropriate merit-based consideration for selection.**

Yes, and of course suitability was the issue around transfer because it was not a promotion, so you're a Level 1 to a Level 1 transfer and you only had to demonstrate suitability for the position you were seeking as a transferee and then some form of negotiation would often go on. And I would also say that encouraging me during that period towards being an organiser was a now deceased member who I hold in very high regard, was Helga McPhee. Helga and I did not hit it off at Watson High School, I was the young Turk, she was the seasoned operator, a very, very substantial woman. Tackling her was not easy but it taught me some skills, but it also taught me the value of integrity. And Helga, to her dying day, was a woman of exceptional integrity.

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**Helga finished her career as an assistant principal at Melrose High School and then in the Schools Office, and of course had a six month period as union secretary.**

And she actually finished then in the office, didn't she, as principal in – she actually became – but she ended up, I think you'll find, as a principal equivalent in the equity area. Yeah, Fiona would be able to tell you more about that.

So I then went – Watson closed in 1987. I took leave without pay in '87 and it closed Dec 1987, so I wasn't there right to the end, but the decision had been made, the enrolment collapsed, the asbestos problem was an OH&S nightmare. With hindsight I would have actively pursued with the union the demolition of that building, but that's hindsight, I didn't think that at the time and probably – and as an activist councillor I wouldn't have been involved directly. Former secretary Joan Corbett was very important through those Watson years until she left the union. Always very supportive, I watched her come to the school, support me as the subbranch president, as a councillor. Even if the union position and mine were a bit different she was always happy to discuss those with me. That was a role model I was very impressed with, a wonderful officer.

And so, I went to Wanniasa High for two years, not a great union school at that time. I turned up there.... I can't remember but I think I immediately became the councillor, and subbranch president in the second year there, I'm not sure, but I was filling a gap because the school was not a great union school, I didn't think, particularly after Watson.

And so during '88 and '89 I was on council and saw that I wanted to get involved in working directly with members for the union. In those days we had annual conference which I later advocated the abolition of with some success; I always thought there was a bit of an artificiality about conference; Council was the active monthly meeting that we needed to help guide Executive and the Officers; I always thought annual conference was a bit of a tradition rather than a positive. But nevertheless, it was my way into the union, I became an organiser.

**And at that point the organiser's position, and they were liaison officer...**

Liaison officers.

**...were elected by conference.**

Conference, that's right, and later by council. Are they still elected?

**Yes. There's still a process in place.**



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Still a process that involves council, yeah, okay. At that stage we were a union office which was pure teacher. I know that's changed; I don't hold...

**Plus the administrative staff.**

Yes, pure teacher plus the administrative staff. I don't have a contemporary view of non-teachers now populating union full time positions, the way it appears to be. I don't have a strong view about it either way, but we were all teachers in those days, and right through, except for the industrial officer, right through my time in the union office we were teachers. And in fact the industrial officer that...

**You know, you're actually wrong about that because we had Rosemary Tilley as the first research officer.**

There you go, I could be wrong, yes.

**And Nick Evans came...**

Well I said except for industrial officer. But we then ended up with Don Cameron who was a teacher, Peter Malone who was a teacher, and after that I've forgotten how it worked. But yes, nevertheless the culture of union officials in the ACTTF and union office was basically teachers, teachers who came out of ACT schools.

**Yes, I'd certainly agree with that.**

So, I then became an organiser, liaison officer/organiser from – I can't remember exactly when the transition was.

**And of course you were coming into what was becoming – well by that stage had become the ACT branch of the Australian Education Union, or in transition the Teachers Union.**

Yes, yes, it was in transition at the time, yes, that's right. I mean, I was still elected by an ACTTF conference I think.

**Yes. But the interesting thing of course is that when amalgamation happened, they had to have a ballot for members, over 90% of members wanted to be a part of a national union, a relatively independent part obviously, the way that the ATU and AEU were set up, but overwhelming interest and support from the membership for that national organisation.**

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So at the point at which Rosemary Richards moved on from the union and I took an interest in the secretary's position, there was some concern at the time that that meant the union would have two male senior officers, and that was a consideration that I think both Clive Haggard and I had discussed. Nevertheless I sensed that it was going to be a transition that I could have one eye to, to that issue, and I became secretary unopposed, and that continued until I left the union at the end of – I left on the first day of 2000 having spent 10 years in the office.

**Can we just talk a little bit about some of the highlights etc of that 10 years. And one that I know that caused a great deal of anxiety, concern and effort on your part was the issue of principal's salaries, and I experienced dealing with the first Liberal government in the ACT which was under Kate Carnell in the late '90s. How did you feel about the situation where you had pressure from some principal members for different ways of determining salary outcomes, ie what's the basis of the salary rather than a simple secondary/primary classification, and the desire of some principals to have, under the industrial relations system, a separate agreement from the rest of the teaching workforce?**

Well in the early period of my being a union officer I'd also completed a master's degree in industrial relations and therefore was a keen student of the industrial relations environment which was changing, and with the defeat of the Keating government in 1996 the individual was being pushed to prominence over the collective, and so there was a cultural shift even in the public sector to that. We had the saga of the Australian Workplace Agreements, the AWA, and that provided the opportunity for some tensions that were always in the union. Some of our tensions were around, we've already mentioned mobility, the issue of primary and secondary teaching parity of hours of face-to-face teaching, the issues of salaries. And there was a move afoot amongst some principals, encouraged by ACT government and the general environment of pushing that they were special, they wanted something special.

**We also had school based management coming into play in this environment as well.**

Yes, individualisation of schools within a system. So, there were some themes. And I was on the record right through this as being opposed to principals having their own agreement. I was opposed to school-based management. I may have been slightly wrong about both but nevertheless it was as a new senior officer of the union, it was a very difficult area to navigate. Also, the issue of school closures and the P&C was there.

So, there were these tensions, and they were very tense times in some ways and we had to navigate our way through them. It also allowed the opportunity for member against member stuff

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to start to grow. Whenever a union officer got involved with one member about what another member might have been doing, or not doing, with them or to them, you had to balance that. And I still think it's one of the most difficult balances any professional union officer has, is when there is a fundamental problem about the treatment of one member by another member.

**And you were in a situation sometimes when we had one organiser, supporting a member in a conflict situation, then another organiser providing support.**

That's right. And we also at the time, we had some principals who were subject to misconduct investigations over enrolment fraud...

**Yes, I was interested in that because of course you were intensely involved in supporting those individual principals, and we should say too that at that time we might have had one or two principals who were not members of the union, but the figure has always been minute in comparison to the overall membership. But just to finish off on the principal's salaries, we wound up having to negotiate a separate agreement for principals against the advice of the union, but nevertheless these members were insistent. That agreement was put in place, it got substantial oppositions from principals too, I think the vote was something in the 60s in favour and in the high 30s against with some people choosing to abstain from voting.**

I don't think I'd recollected that statistic until you just mentioned it.

**But it had a short life because of course we were then faced with a change of government in 2000. I'm probably getting a little off track here, but three months after the conclusion of that principal's agreement, as a union agreement, the rest of the teaching workforce had an enterprise bargaining agreement put in place which gave larger percentage increases to the overall workforce that was achieved for most of the principals. And subsequently with a new government in place, a new you could say, industrial atmosphere with Jon Stanhope's new government, a subsequent agreement saw principals requesting to come back into a single agreement for the teaching workforce, which was very much welcomed by principals, by members, and by the union office and executive. So that was an interesting piece of history because of course we also had the Australian Principals Union, largely based in WA and Victoria, attempting to turn itself into a national organisation. And they got no joy in the ACT from our members at all. Our members, they wanted a separate agreement initially, were not interested in participating in an alternative organisation to the AEU. Then of course after a very brief period, a matter of less than, I**

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**think, two years the principals wound up as a significant part of the existing enterprise bargaining process.**

I think that occurred around the time I'd left.

**Yes, I think you had left.**

I was heading in that direction but – so yes, reflecting, I mean, some of the most difficult meetings that I ever became involved in as a union officer were attempting to argue the union position with those principals. And it became extremely volatile, it could at times be unpleasant, and it certainly honed the skills of robust discussion in a respectful way. And generally speaking, it was respectful but it was extraordinarily robust.

**You mentioned the fact that there were a number of principals, I think the figure in the end was 11 principals involved in what was a public scandal about the enrolment numbers in schools and the way in which there'd been some, I'll use the terms falsification, of numbers. In almost every circumstance it was to provide increased staffing to the schools...**

That's right, yeah, no personal gain.

**...which were struggling. There was, I think, only one example of personal gain.**

And that was indirect, wasn't it?

**It meant that the person moved salary level...**

Yeah, that's what I meant, yes.

**But in the end result of that action was taken against those principals. The government under Kate Carnell used it as a political whipping post for public education. And there was some demotions, almost all turned out to be temporary, after 12 months principals were able to apply – and in some cases deputy principals – apply for vacancies and were promoted back to that level. There was one dismissal based on a salary benefit, and another dismissal based on continuing falsification of records.**

I think you'll find also one of those dismissals was partly tied up with a failure to exercise honesty when given the opportunity to do so.

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**That is correct. But the union provided counselling, advice, support, legal advice, to those members through that period and it's one positive outcome from that scandal, both its political ramifications, but also for personal impact, that so many of those principals were successful in winning back positions and moving on to enjoy positive careers. It is a part of our history that the union provided the support sought by those members and it was provided successfully.**

And it was very intense support, and it was support that had to take place in a very confidential environment, even acknowledging externally that you were supporting these people at the time was extremely difficult. And I do recall one case where the spouse of one of the principals felt, despite very intensive support from this organisation, that their spouse had been let down by the union, and that led to some unpleasantness. But nevertheless I think every union officer involved in that, and that was probably principally myself and Clive Haggar, can hold their heads high about the personal exercise that we engaged in, probably to the expense of our other work. Those principals received very intensive support by two senior union officers.

**One of the most significant overarching elements of course, union organisation during the time, was the focus from the ACTU and the AEU nationally around what's called the organising model, versus one that was more service orientated to members. Do you have any views today, 20 years on, as to that particular model and where we fell in terms of...**

I think part of the issue was that it was very difficult to change a very high service model of the ACTTF to try and get members, first of all, one, to understand what an organising model would mean for them in a workplace, and secondly, actually getting them to exercise within that model, the organising model. I reflect now, after 20 years later, this union, almost without exception, has seen every officer that I had anything to do with work extraordinarily hard on behalf of those members, both in the positions the union staff took, and the hours they put into it.

So, the service model, we were a victim of our own success. We were particularly good at it. I think I was personally very good at it, and sometimes later as a senior officer was criticised for continuing to be good at it at the expense of some of the other work perhaps I should have done. But I just wasn't good at it, I'd been well taught by my previous senior officers about how to be good at it, and I watched the organisers that worked both alongside me and later under my supervision were very good at it. So, it was very difficult for us to move away from it. And I am never sure how you could measure that. I think we did encourage some branches to become more self-sufficient, but that was often dependent on an individual who was in it. Executive

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member Roger Amy probably made Lake Ginninderra College better at it than what it would have been otherwise, and Rosemary Richards also went there as principal for a while.

Yes. So, there was some individual workplaces that probably did quite well at it, but there were others who, they were NRMA members, when the car breaks down you want the NRMA. They don't actually have a lot of union interest otherwise. They are genuine but I always talked about them as NRMA members. They paid their dues, their expectations of the union were very high because they'd paid their dues. So that was a significant minority of the union. So, with that culture, very difficult. I am not at all convinced that the organising model ever became embedded in ACT schools. Having said that, I am not sure how you'd measure it. I would be interested even in your reflection about that.

**Well of course I've been out of the exercise for 12 years.**

Yeah, well I've been out for 20.

**And from my perspective you could adopt the principles of organising but in the end you couldn't let go of the principles of being a good service provider in the union.**

That is right. And I want to emphasise that we are very good at it. I have talked to other union officials both before and since, and during my studies, because my master's degree course group was largely union officials, or employer HR people. Yes, and to a tee, when we had discussions with them – and I've since had discussions with my South Australian colleagues; I had particular connections to the South Australian branch of the union, still do. And they still say that they can't believe, other unions cannot believe, how much effort the AEU put in to servicing their members.

**I think one of the points that might be worth discussing is in fact well, the fact, that teaching is a very vulnerable profession that every day you're fronting an environment that the possibility of allegations of misconduct, or unprofessional conduct, or inadequate professional conduct, leaves teachers in that environment quite vulnerable. Although there are plenty of examples both in this country and around the world where teacher union membership doesn't achieve the levels that are achieved in the ACT and some other branches of the AEU. It's an interesting, perhaps micro debate for us to have.**

And since I've left of course the AEU has expanded its coverage.

**Membership while expanding in schools to support staff has suffered a decline in TAFE. It's interesting now that both sides of politics are starting to talk about reviving TAFE**

**nationally. Interestingly enough, given the disaster of the training models in Australia today, where TAFE nationally has suffered deliberate undermining from government, massive reductions in funding, we're now in a situation of course where money is being poured into it but the crises began with the privatisation of components of TAFE training, where for profit organisations were able to access with little accountability, massive federal government funds.**

And rorted the system to the point of criminal behaviour.

**Hundreds of millions of dollars.**

Oh, disgraceful.

**Warren you also had the opportunity to work with some notable individuals in the years as a member and organiser, and you've mentioned people like Keith Lawler and Helga McPhee. And Rosemary Richards in particular who you worked for a number of years. Now Rosemary of course came into the union as a Band 2, or Level 2, officer as it became, in a primary school, she wound up representing the union on the National Schools Council, and finished her career – unfortunately dying at a youngish age – she finished her career as principal of Lake Ginninderra College. I was wondering if you'd just like to reflect on your relationship with Rosemary and how you saw that she provided leadership to the organisation.**

Yes, well of course Rosemary had a minor disappointment at one point where on the floor of council she was narrowly defeated for the temporary job of secretary.

**For six months, by Helga McPhee.**

By Helga McPhee. And what a choice many of us had, and I have to say as my recollection is, that I voted for Helga McPhee, and I think I later told Rosemary that. I hope I did. I had a personal loyalty to Helga. Clearly Rosemary was more suited to the position, particularly on reflection, but Helga was a staunch unionist and her integrity and her credentials were – in a sense of being a union official, were solid. But at the end of the day the union office environment was probably not one that Helga was going to flourish in, whereas Rosemary clearly was. So yes, we all make mistakes.

So, I came in. Rosemary – I always regarded it as working with Rosemary rather than for her, in a sense – she was very supportive of me, occasionally needed to perhaps suggest I could have done something better; but it was always very didactic, supportive. She was probably, present

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company included, both you and I Clive included, probably the smartest union officer I worked with, in just pure intellect. She could see through something that perhaps the rest of us were a bit close to. Having said that she could also get too close to it, from time to time, and it was not sometimes easy, particularly towards the end, to actually say to Rosemary, now hang on, I've just spent a week in schools, I need you to hear what I'm going to say. But once she got over that she would listen and she could – the wheels would turn and she was very good at bringing to executive some pragmatic positions. Occasionally executive and her locked swords and that was difficult for her.

**The executive of the time was quite a stropky organisation.**

Yes, it was a difficult body. And of course once there became two male senior officers – there were a couple of females on executive who in principle took objection to that, and we just had to deal with it, you know, we had to deal with it. But Rosemary was a workaholic, as was Clive, as was I at the end, and she worked too hard, she did work too hard. But she'd gone to Lake Ginninderra by the time she became unwell again with the recurrence of her melanoma, very sad.

But yes, she was a very notable union official both at a local and national level. She had a profile in the national office. She was again probably one of the – she was smarter, perhaps not as pragmatic, as some of the federal officials that she worked with. So, I had a huge admiration for Rosemary and she had a point of view that you were compelled to listen to because of the strength of its integrity and its intellectual rigor. That did not mean we always agreed, but that didn't matter. And she also worked extremely well with Clive Haggar.

Again, I'm sure they had some closed door discussions that I wasn't party to, just as Clive and I had some closed door discussions that other officers were not party to. But they were always about very difficult issues, very difficult issues. And when two people of capacity, such as Clive and Rosemary, were disagreeing about something, it must have meant it was a difficult issue, because you could agree about the easy ones. The same as Clive and I could disagree about what were difficult issues. And so, I think the health of the union office was always at the forefront of those two senior officers in my time here. The sadness would be that the average member would never appreciate the depth of thought that went into it.

Along those lines I remember being at a stop work meeting where I'd spoken and a member in the audience, whose name I remember, fundamentally disagreed with what I'd said and



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screamed out in front of 2,500 people, why don't you listen to the members? My retort, almost in tears, was which one?

Being a union officer always, at some point meant balancing about where was the majority sitting, because how else did you resolve it? Sometimes you could put in place a solution that did meet 95% of your members' needs and desires, but sometimes you had to go 60/40. And if I had my time again I think I'd be even more pragmatic about that than what I was at the time.

**Since you held the position of secretary 21C for so long, I'd just like to ask you a question in terms of policy development. Now you talked about being an advocate for the end of annual conference. Now annual conference in the early years was of course the major policy determinant, it was where major debates were had. That changed over the years to in fact the empowerment of council meeting 10 months of the year, on a monthly basis. Council became the policy body but as the union developed policy seemed to actually – policy development became less and less, other than within the context of enterprise bargaining. I agree that it's got longer and longer. The positions that we took were negotiated and then locked for three- or four-year periods with agreements. Now, do you think from the point of view of participation of members, that process meant that there was more or less participation?**

One of my views about annual conference was very pragmatic. I saw union staff, both administrative and professional staff, put a lot of effort into putting together an annual conference each November, which I saw as providing very little additional benefit to the organisation than what another council meeting could achieve, yet remember it had to have an electoral college etc etc. So, it was as much pragmatic about that as anything else.

**There became issues of quorum.**

Quorums, and two days, and getting a venue and all that sort of stuff, and keeping members engaged, particularly in the latter sessions on a Sunday afternoon. It exhausted union officers, including me, for what I regarded as very little additional benefit.

**You did in the end do a master's degree in industrial...**

Relations, that's right.

**You were involved subsequently for 20 years, in the industrial relations field. I'm just interested in your views, and we'll forget the Howard years and WorkChoices, which had significant impact for those three years, but I'm just wondering in terms of your view**

**about the enterprise bargaining process and that opportunity that members had to participate in decisions about their working environment.**

See, the Canadian model had always been that, and this is one of the things about being on teacher exchange, you met Canadian teachers as well, and I've become lifelong friends with some of them. In their back pocket they had a little book that was called – it was their collective agreement and even by then, back in the early '80s, I was on exchange in '83, it was a little book. And we used to have something...

**We had a member's handbook.**

Yeah, the member's handbook, and this little book was effectively their employment agreement, and basically every aspect of their professional lives was wrapped up in this little agreement. So, policies, things that we used to have policies about which were never part of wage settlements, gradually got dragged into. So the time to engage with your members – engagement with members was about forming a new agreement, which I think we'd started to do quite a bit of by the time I left, and it's become even more embedded and more longer etc, but it is a time when members can actually see in a document – and I don't know how many of them read it properly – most aspects of their professional lives.

The only issue that I always thought was negative was that we sometimes wanted to incorporate issues in there that were so called productivity measures, and they were smoke and mirrors. And secondly, that there was the risk that we would incorporate in an agreement something we didn't really like because we'd get a bit more money for it, around, for example, occupational violence. Now it's manifested hugely since I left in terms of how it's dealt with and managed. But I never saw it as tangible to say it's alright to put in perhaps risks about occupational violence because you're getting a pay rise.

Or sometimes teachers didn't need more money, they needed more support. And the problem with enterprise agreements in the early days was it seemed to be that, well no, we actually will take the opportunity to get them a bit more money because we think it will make our lives better, and some of the principal stuff revolved around that. Running a big school with schools based manager, hugely complex and so on, you know, I work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, I've nearly killed myself but it's alright because you're giving me a bit more money. No. Those principals needed a change in the structure of their schools to make their lives more productive, needs that weren't necessarily met simply because you paid them more. So that's always been a bit of tension about what you put in an enterprise agreement and whether it deserves a financial

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reward or it simply is there to make people's professional lives more productive and the education of the kids more effective.

**Look I think that's a very good point for further discussion in the broader environment. But actually it's jogged my memory in terms of the second tier.**

Oh, the Band 2s, getting rid of all the 3s.

**The deputy...**

Getting rid of deputy – yeah, and having all – yeah, flattening the structure.

**Yeah, for a 4% salary increase. Do you want to make any observations on that?**

Well, I was in a school at the time.

**Oh, right, okay.**

I was in a school, yes, I was in a school.

**I might leave that for subsequent articles.**

It was '88. See, I was actually on leave without pay when it started. I remember seeing robust discussion at council.

**There certainly was. But just somebody else I'd just like you – who's not longer with us, just to make some observations about this, I know that you were quite close, was our first external recruit from another branch of the union from the New South Wales Teachers Federation as industrial officer, Don Cameron. And, you know, it was certainly an appointment that solidified the notion that we were looking for people with external expertise as well as of course the teaching background. So, do you want to talk a bit about your working relationship with Don?**

Well, it was an interesting one for me because I was an applicant for the position, Rosemary and Kevin Peoples (future TAFE AEU national president) were on the selection panel for that particular appointment and I was an applicant, which would have seen me move sideways from being an organiser to being industrial officer. And I don't think anyone doubted that I was suitable for the position. Well, I would hope they didn't doubt my suitability, but they decided, and in my view correctly, to recruit from outside.

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The character of Don was immediately obvious to me when one of the first things Don and I did was have a conversation about the fact that he was now working three metres away from a person who wanted the job. I think it was a testament to both our characters that we had that discussion and immediately clicked and became very good colleagues, and later for a short period I was secretary while he was industrial officer. To then have to go on and be fundamentally involved in organising his funeral was one of most difficult jobs I did as a union officer and as a colleague. It was a terrible shock to the union, he was 48 years old. He was another very smart cookie with a way of looking at things that the rest of us didn't see sometimes. He had great humour, great skill, and I think was a great positive to the union office, and had interpersonal skills, intellect, industrial knowledge, connections with other parts of the AEU that were of huge benefit to the union office. Unfortunately, as I recollect, that only had a duration of 18 months and he was dead. It directly, and indirectly, impacted on me personally. That probably led to me leaving the AEU office a little earlier than I otherwise might have.

**Thanks for that. Warren and just to conclude our discussion, I mean, with your career background both as a teacher, activist, union official and subsequently as an industrial relations consultant, what advice would you like to give to young – and obviously not so young these days in terms of recruitment – teachers viz a viz the union and their working environment, and the profession overall?**

So, do you mean – recruitment of who, teachers? Or recruitment of officers to the union?

**No, no, I'm talking about teachers now. You're in a situation of being on recruitment panels, staffing panels. Your broad perspective, somebody who's just come out of university, is a qualified teacher and they've been offered a position to work in the ACT, what advice would you give to them?**

Well of course I'd advise them to join the union, but I'd also advise them to take great care of themselves. Anecdotal evidence, and I'm not sure what the research shows, that we are losing too many of our beginning teachers too early in their careers, losing them from the profession. It can't be just money. Well I hope it's not just money, in the sense that they are moving on, and this is national so it can't just be an ACT issue – and I think probably the union, I notice, has invested time, money and energy and perspective to beginning teachers. I think they've run beginning teachers conferences, yes. I would encourage them to do even more of that.

I remember beginning teachers getting clearly crucial support– when we had the old probation system and the union was involved in peer assessment and so on, that some of the most difficult

issues was when a principal and a peer felt that teaching was not for that person. And on occasions of course they were right, and those people needed, for their own benefit and everyone else's, to leave the profession. But I also think just on the other side of that, there were lots of teachers that were struggling as beginning teachers who later became valuable professionals. I don't think I struggled as a beginning teacher, but the toughest years of teaching are, I reckon, the first two or three years. Because teaching's about relationships, it's about feeling comfortable, it's about looking after your physical and mental health, and I'm not sure that we still haven't got some work to do in that area as an organisation. And I think I saw a little bit of, oh I did it tough as a beginning teacher so they can as well. I have always thought too many of our older teachers, in my time, forgot about what it was like to be a beginning teacher.

**But the union's there to help.**

Yeah, the union's there to help. And look, it's a bottomless pit, frankly. I don't know, I see that the union currently here in the ACT has some young organisers and I'm wondering how much time, and how professionally skilled they might be to assist their young peers. I mean, by the time I was an organiser I was 37. But now I see some of the younger organisers are clearly in their 20s, late 20s, very early 30s. The potential for them to help young teachers is enormous, but it must be a particularly difficult area for them to allocate time to.

**Is there anything else that you'd like to raise for the record?**

Well, I think I never saw a union officer who didn't work hard. They varied a bit in terms of that but it was a job that picked you up and carried you along. Clive Haggard always worked too hard, and I think from time to time that affected his perspective. I think I fell into the same trap a little bit, and it certainly played a role in me deciding that after 10 years I didn't want to do that any more. So, union officers need to take care about themselves, and I think they need to pay some attention to succession planning. I think both Clive and I were probably a little remiss in that area, and that's partly because you could just get swept away with the work. I've never worked as hard at anything in my life as the four years I was a senior officer, before or since.

**Okay, well we might on that particular point leave it Warren and I'll say thank you very much and we'll bring the recorded part of the discussion to a close.**

[End of Transcript]