

CPM Reviews

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Speaker Index

Identifier	Name / Position	Role
Mr Haggar:	Mr Clive Haggar, Project Officer	Interviewer
Ms Harasymiw:	Ms Lyn Harasymiw, Former Activist Member	Interviewee

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Mr Haggar: It's the 18th November and I'm having a discussion with Lyn Harasymiw. Lyn was a strong activist in – particularly in the '70s and '80s. And Lyn, thank you very much for agreeing to have this discussion with me today for the AEU Project. I thought me might begin with me asking you to tell us a bit about your early years as a teaching – as a teacher.

Ms Harasymiw: Okay. Well I, along with a whole generation or a cohort got a scholarship to go to uni. I didn't actually want to be a teacher but my father explained to me it was a very good job for a woman, so I didn't do law, which was my first choice. And also a teacher's scholarship provided a living wage, which the other scholarship didn't, so that was very attractive.

Anyway, so I finished, I think about '66 I started teaching, I would have been about 20 – 21. And I went to the ANU and then I came back to Canberra

after I graduated because I was in a relationship with a person who was teaching in Canberra. And I joined the union and was a member of the Secondary Teachers Association.

Mr Haggar: **That's the Secondary Teachers Association of the New South Wales Teachers Federation?**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, yes. And I became a member of the – of that group. And I've told you my story about going to a conference, an annual conference, and I was the only female there. We went for lunch and we all adjourned in the Worker's Club, which used to be the Civic then, and to a bar. And all the boys went into the public bar, from which I was excluded, so I sat in the ladies bar. Very clear message then about – about what was going on.

And of course, at that stage, in terms of being a young teacher, we were still being required to do things like measure girls' uniform lengths, the length between their knee and the bottom of their uniforms. We used to go along, we had – used to have a tape measure and measure this ridiculous thing. So we really were back, it was real 19th Century stuff, and it's a, you know, version of – of education for girls. There was full of assumptions about women's place in the world.

And there was also, at that stage, and for many years actually, they used to flog boys, and the general idea was that it wasn't appropriate for women to be flogging boys, but somehow it was appropriate for men to be flogging boys. So that's kind of also correlated with why they needed to be promoted, because the flogging was largely reserved and done by the heads of department, or the deputy heads, the classroom teacher didn't do – do much flogging, from my experience.

And I remember one thing, where I think my first year out and I sent a boy out, he was being a pain in the bum, and I sent him out. And when I came out at the end of the lesson he wasn't there. So, I went up to the head of department and said did you – have you seen so-and-so? He said yes, I flogged him, sent him off. I said why did you flog him? Well, he was in the corridor. I said, okay, I've got the message, that's an effective way of controlling me, it had nothing to do with the poor kid, it was all about

controlling me. And that ability to essentially flog males didn't go until really quite late, and it was very much something that – which, as I say, I think seen as a masculine prerogative and that you really couldn't – and, you know, when dealing with adolescent boys it had to be. And that sort of set a kind of cultural attitude, I think, within schools.

So after – you know, after these kinds of experience, although I maintained my membership of the union I basically, you know, withdrew after about two years and was no longer a sort of active member in any sense.

But with the '70s, and especially with the election of the Labor government, there was a real kind of cultural shift and a real change, and women's issues were very much put at the – at the forefront. And that was – there was a real revitalisation, and really sourcing for positions like Rosemary Richards' position in the Resource Centre.

Mr Haggar: **This is the elimination of sexism position?**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, that's right.

Mr Haggar: **Yeah, it was co-funded by the union and by the Schools Authority.**

Ms Harasymiw: That's right, yes. So that – you know, they – those kinds of things were really great catalysts for change. You know, there was still a lot of – I wouldn't say it was easy but certainly someone of Rosemary's calibre made a hell of a lot of difference. And so there were changes happening within the broader society, and given the – the makeup of school teachers, given that they represented probably the best educated group of women in the country at the time.

I remember when I finished school, I was at a selective high school and there were some really bright girls there. Well they all – they all were sent off to primary school teaching. I'm sure you don't have the calibre of those women any more, intellectually, to the ones that you used to have in a previous generation, because their choices were so – in terms of what they could choose to do, were so much more circumscribed.

I remember I applied for a scholarship to go to New Guinea and was knocked back. A brother who came along a couple of years behind me, and

his results weren't nearly as good, he got in. One wonders why. So, you know, there were a whole lot of things that really were still very much limiting about women's careers and how they sort themselves.

Mr Haggar: **Can I just take you back to your qualifications for a moment, when you said that you were at ANU, you would have been in the situation of graduating with a degree, and then a Diploma of Education, which makes you four year trained.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes.

Mr Haggar: **Which was again, looking at your peer group, a lot of the males and females had actually come out of teacher's colleges with only a two year qualification.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, some of them did only have two years, yep, yep.

Mr Haggar: **So, I was just wondering, you know, you're starting out as a young secondary teacher, what was the motivator that sent you off to that Secondary Teachers Association conference, to have that unfortunate experience of exclusion?**

Ms Harasymiw: Well, I mean, in many ways my politics were similar to the males that were there. Most of them came from working class families, you know, they were scholarship boys, you know, they were fairly political, and anyway I had a similar outlook. Look I was just a graduate, as many of the history graduates are, sort of tend to be sort of a bit political. Yeah, and I was interested, I was genuinely interested, I actually wanted to participate, and it was a way of getting to know what – what the place was about, really, and how it worked.

But you know, I was interested in also the idea that unions could have a broader social agenda. The New South Wales Teachers Federation, there were certainly pivotal people within it had been quite active in the anti-Vietnam war stuff.

Mr Haggar: **Yeah, the moratorium in particular.**

Ms Harasymiw: That's right, that's right. So, you know, the union had had a fairly strong left wing stance on social issues like that, and I quite liked that and felt

comfortable with it and felt that, yeah, that was good. Having said – talking about the limitations it's also – I mean, when I started in '66 women were permanent, they could get paid maternity leave. You know, we were better off than women within the private sector. And I don't know what year the commonwealth stopped sacking women on marriage because they used to have to get – once they got married they were sacked and they could seek temporary employment subsequently, which didn't usually carry superannuation with it and things like that, and certainly you weren't eligible for promotion.

Mr Haggar: **Yeah, of course, that marriage bar was a significant issue for a lot of female teachers, but so was the issue of differential salaries between males and females. And even as late as 1970, in my own experience, public service clerks, there were differential salaries even at the 17 year old clerk level.**

Ms Harasymiw: And they had a female rate, that's right.

Mr Haggar: **Yes.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, I know you – I always remember when I was – I used to get jobs while I was at uni, part time jobs, I always worked in grocery stores because handing groceries, you got a male rate of pay. I don't know why kind of a can of baked beans is male and something else is female but apparently it was and so you got a better rate of pay.

I remember having a chat with a young woman who said oh, no, no, she was going to stay working in the chemist. And I said but you don't get a proper rate of pay. She said oh no, but you get to handle lipsticks.

Mr Haggar: **Oh, goodness.**

Ms Harasymiw: I knew which I preferred.

But those things kind of – you know, that was very much the '60s kind of hangover, and with the '70s came a real push for change.

Mr Haggar: **One of the interesting motivators in talking to some of the other women of your generation was such things as organised childcare to**

encourage participation of union members. And it's interesting that that was seen as significant as it was. But for so long they could complain about attendance at union functions, or councils, by females who had these significant childcare responsibilities, yet nothing was done to actually support them to have their children minded, to release them to participate in those policy formulating bodies.

Ms Harasymiw: No. Well, I mean, the union, as other workplaces, was also caught up with this thing of, you know, how much of women's experience is relevant to unionism? In other words, you know, should a union look at the question of women's broken service and the impact that that has on their superannuation. Should unions look at the fact that women had primary childcare responsibilities often and need support to get to team meetings. Should abortion be – you know, access to kind of safe contraception, that kind of stuff, should that be part of a union program?

Because that was the debate and in a way that was the thing that I think even fairly left wing males within the union felt uncomfortable about that. They weren't too sure how much the reality of women's lives ought to be included in their union framework. And yet these were fairly left wing males, many of them, who would have been absolutely right on side in terms of the Vietnam moratorium, in terms of the antiapartheid demonstrations. But when it came to actually incorporating women's lived experiences, you know, they weren't – they weren't altogether comfortable.

Mr Haggar: One of the most challenging policies that the union adopted, and this is as late as the early '80s, was support for affirmative action, because of the total lack of female representation at the senior levels of the service. For example we had no female secondary school principals, and only a handful of primary school principals.

Ms Harasymiw: That's right, yeah, that's right. Well, that was right and proper. Obviously women didn't want it and, you know, would you want a woman boss? I mean, you know, it was the natural order of things really. I mean, I think that during the '70s and '80s there was a group of women within the union who worked very hard on affirmative action. It was coming – you've got to

remember that the original affirmative action was very much driven from Wolinski's public service.

Mr Haggar: **Peter Wolinski being the head of the public service during that time, yes.**

Ms Harasymiw: Public service commissioner, yeah.

Mr Haggar: **Yes.**

Ms Harasymiw: And – and so that initiative, that was really an employer initiative to raise the question of women's participation in the workplace, and very much in terms of looking at their positions within the hierarchy, the promotional positions.

And of course that had a flow over politically into where you had a group of well educated women ready to move, and that was really teaching. But there really was a sense that those careers belonged to the men, they did not belong to the women. And, you know, even though it had been known for years, especially in primary teaching, that men got into primary teaching with much lower academic qualifications than the women. And as Rosemary Richards always used to say, so you let them in on lower qualifications and the first thing – you know, because you need them in the class because you've got to have a male standing up in front of kids – and the first thing they do is get promoted out of the classroom. So, you know, they don't stay in the classroom, you know, so this was just kind of the way it went, I think.

You know, when it comes to promotion, not everyone can get it and there is a sense that you're taking my job. There was a sense that – even when, you know, there was politics which in fact gave a priority to women. You know, there was – you know, people would say, well you know, what happened in the past has got no bearing on what happened now and, you know, my career is being blighted. So I think it's probably very hard to move from a position where you say look, socially it's best to have women and men in – in authority positions, it gives you a better product and actually sort of be prepared to have your own career sort of curtailed in some way.

I mean, you see it in relation to race questions too, any kind of affirmative action, it's not just – just women.

Mr Haggar: **Well certainly notion – the modern acceptance of diversity being good for an organisation.**

Ms Harasymiw: That's right.

Mr Haggar: **We were not – we were not a diverse teaching service either in terms of gender, in terms of ethnicity, or in fact, really, life's lived experiences. Teaching, particularly through the scholarship system, tended to be a vehicle for working class males to get themselves into the middle class.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes. Well, I mean, that – that was true too for many of the women who came in on scholarships, and they would have been often the first members of their family going to uni. Yes, so – and it was a good clean job and it beat certain trade jobs where you were working six days a week. You know, there has been changes in working conditions, but it was – I think, you know, I think you work quite hard as a tradesman in a lot of situations, so that was seen as sort of fairly bizarre.

I mean, the other option to me, when I left, was that I could work in the bank. Well, I know the Commonwealth Bank had a policy at that stage and didn't change until quite late in the late '70s – '80s it might have been – where if you joined the Commonwealth Bank that was fine, but in order to get promoted you had to become permanent and that involved sitting an exam, but you had to be invited to sit the exam, and women were never invited to sit the exam. Yes, all very neat and nice really, no problem.

Yeah, so that's sort of – so that was the kind of atmosphere, I think, a bit, and it really was only a matter of time before I think the women started pushing, and we did have a number of, I think, really committed and talented women. I mean, Rosemary was outstanding, you know, she really probably deserves a story on her own behalf.

Mr Haggar: **Well I think that – that Rosemary's nine years as president and several years as secretary before that, everyone I've interviewed recognises the role that she played, and not just locally but also on national bodies as well, for example the Schools Council of the National Board of Education, Employment and Training under the Hawke government.**

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Ms Harasymiw: Yes.

Mr Haggar: Can I just say, one of the interesting elements of this is this transition that takes place in the '70s, leading into the '80s, from largely male dominated union hierarchy, with the establishment of our own union in '72, where, you know, I was told the original decision was made to establish a separate ACT union over a beer by four individuals at the Wello (Wellington Hotel). Of course all of – the four were males who went on to leadership positions in the union and within the education system.

But – and I appreciate the cultural milieu that was going on and the pressure across society to get women to seize opportunities, make opportunities, and to design policies that would remove some of the barriers for women's advancement. But within our own union things like the women's committee, things like the informal meetings that used to take place, the women's conference, Can you enlighten me a bit on how that networking, both formal and informal, developed to get to the point whereby in the early '80s we're looking at a union that has a female president, a female secretary, female organisers and was actively prosecuting issues like permanent part time work, abortion law reform etc.

Ms Harasymiw: Yeah, well, the first thing is that you've had – you've had in the late '60s, you'd had the fairly radical women's lib stuff, okay?

Mr Haggar: Yes.

Ms Harasymiw: And there was a very large women's lib group in Canberra, many of whom were school teachers. And, you know, when the time was right – I mean, you know, they came – the women came out of that and started putting their – you know, when they could see some sort of push for action. I always remember Julia saying to me – you know, we were sort of talking about assertive action, getting women up in promotional positions and so forth – and Julia said oh, we're putting a lot of effort into this and it's really not our – not our personal issue, and I said, I know but we've got to go there.

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You know, there were a lot of fairly radical women who really had a very broad social agenda in terms of the change that they wanted to see in society, and many of those they would share with their male unionists, you know, in terms of what they wanted or what they valued. And we increasingly found an awful lot of energy going into the question of promotion because that was the one that the managers wanted also, you know.

Mr Haggar: **Yes. Can I just pick you up on that, in terms of the issue of promotion, I mean, we were in a situation under New South Wales where you had your all powerful school inspectors making recommendations about who was to go on the various promotional lists, and then seniority would apply.**

Ms Harasymiw: That's right.

Mr Haggar: **And of course if you had broken service you were automatically handicapped there.**

Ms Harasymiw: Not only that, if you – if you went out into the country, you know, and it was much easier for males to do, especially if they had a wife, you jumped the list.

Mr Haggar: **Preferred acceleration.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, that's right. Well, of course, when the ACT authority came in it – it was very much modelled. Because it was new it was much more about – the '70s it was more about trying new things, it was more consultative, you had a new CEO who was – you know, wanted to try new things was, you know, really interested in quality of education. I mean, you know, the idea of getting away from Bridge Street (NSW Dept. of Education) was very liberating. I mean, it struck a chord to me when Julia said, oh we always had a saying, you know, it was my saying, if there's ever a revolution half the teachers won't join because they'll be down throwing bombs at Bridge Street, they'll just use the revolution as a cover.

Mr Haggar: **Just in terms of – I mean, the union officers of the time negotiated things like peer assessment, like eligibility – you know I should have used the term peer assessment for eligibility – once you'd achieved**

that you were entitled to apply for positions on merit but still with seniority as a determinant. But like the Commonwealth Public Service, you had to demonstrate merit or at least its equivalent in an appeal situation, plus seniority. And it took a number of years before that seniority barrier, and then eventually the eligibility system was removed and you had straight merit come into play for promotion...

Ms Harasymiw: Yes. Well you were dismantling something which had existed for generations. I mean, that didn't just happen in teaching obviously, it happened in a whole – it happened right across the public sector, this move to some definition of merit of which seniority was not, you know, a measure. So, it really did take a while for that to, as you say, overcome.

But of course, the thing is that the ACT system right from the start was much more consultative, it was much more participatory. You know, women could get in there, you know, even if it was just on selection panels, because the union had a very powerful role, or played a very powerful role in staff selection panels and that gave quite a number of women experience in terms of the systems and understanding the systems. And so that – a lot of those – that opening up of the – of the system and the consultations, which happened with the new union, women were able to take advantage of.

And on the other side you had the Schools Commission with a number of radical women, Shirley Randall – I can't think, there's another woman who's a good friend of Julia's, can't remember her name at the moment, she went on to the ABC. Anyway, she was on the ACT Schools Authority for quite a long while. So a lot of – a lot of women found themselves in very pivotal positions, you know, they were government appointees and things like this, and they were really able to, because many of them did have very much feminist politics were able to support and foster a lot of these issues. Now the – in terms of the women's groups, they were fairly informal. They were mainly – they were very social. They, you know – that's really kind of – people like Cathy Robertson were very strong in them, had a very strong profile. Cathy – Cathy was a bit like a terrier, she would just go for it. And she certainly had a lot of energy and she was supportive of women and drove people mad sometimes, a lot of the time, but yeah, she was certainly – was in there fighting.

And in some ways I think she became – she became the fall guy for a lot of the male hostility because she certainly didn't have Rosemary's – Rosemary never compromised what she wanted to say but she was very skilled at the way she did it, very skilled. But because she came in her – the presidency and the secretary's position much later than Cathy and things had changed. Things had really moved forward.

Mr Haggar: **When you said – yeah, it's interesting, when we actually think of it, in terms of actual elapsed time there's not much distance between Cathy's two years as president – she's then – you then have, from memory, Peter O'Connor for three – I think three years, with Rosemary coming in behind him.**

Ms Harasymiw: That's right.

Mr Haggar: **Firstly, as secretary, and then being elected unopposed as president.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yep.

Mr Haggar: **So, in real terms it's a relatively short period, but I do appreciate an awful lot was going on at that time.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes. I think an awful lot had also gone on in the broader society. It had – from '75, from the election of that Labor government, even though they were only in for a short period of time, what they did was amazing in terms – you know, they really were ready to move, they had a lot of creative thinkers, they really did set in motion the framework for a lot of social change. And – and people were ready for it and they grabbed it, and they ran with it. And I think that's what happened. As you say it was only a three year period. Cathy was the – I think for a while, for a year she was in the – she was in the Schools Authority, I think. When I was working for the union she was in the Schools Authority as the EO officer, I think, looking at employment issues. And then she left that, I think, and went into the union position.

Yeah, and all those issues were, you know, then put on the table. So even when she lost the election the women's group still was – you know, the issues were beginning to percolate and they kept going, they kept going. So,

you know, obviously Rosemary had a different style to Cathy but I do think the timing was also important.

Mr Haggar: **Yes, and a more radicalised progressive view generally.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, yes. Yeah, yeah. And as you say, very short period of time. But I think – I think – it's always easy to say this, I think that looking back on it, people were ready to move. You know that thing of 'its time' (1972 ALP election campaign slogan), was well and truly overdue in terms of a whole lot of issues, a whole lot.

Mr Haggar: **And can I suggest too though, because you've raised this point, that being in Canberra with the Commonwealth Public Service also going through these issues, developing policies around permanent part time work, they'd previously got rid of the marriage bar, removing gender as a wage issue, moving towards getting rid of seniority for promotion. So, we were picking up very much, as we were commonwealth employees at the time that sort of milieu.**

Ms Harasymiw: Absolutely, absolutely. And, you know, the context for that was a whole lot of work that was going on reforming the public sector. And, you know, Wolinsky did the big – led the big reforms. He was very much committed and had a very active public role on the – on abortion issues. He, you know, he really did provide leadership. And then his wife was of course – she was in charge of the – I don't know what it's called, but anyway, it was the – you know, the equal employment unit within the Public Service Commission – Public Service Board. So – and there were networks, obviously, that crossed because of the small nature of Canberra. And it probably wouldn't have happened as quickly, maybe in Sydney, although Melbourne had a very big – quite a radical thing going. I didn't have anything to do so much with the Victorian union, but certainly in education content, Melbourne was offering much more alternative ways of looking at education and much more liberal progressive ways of delivering things.

Mr Haggar: **Of course, in Victoria you had the divided teacher unions.**

Ms Harasymiw: That's right.

Mr Haggar: **And – and particularly with the influence in secondary education of the VSTA.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, yes, yep.

Mr Haggar: **And of course, all of that competitive unionism went on until the formulation of the Victorian branch of the Australian Education Union.**

Just taking you back again to the formation of the secondary colleges in the '70s. I mean, you were one of the very early staff members of what was then Phillip College. In terms of the establishment of the colleges, how did that feel as a classroom teacher in terms of changing practice and changing culture?

Ms Harasymiw: Well, it was a big change, mainly because teachers had so much spirit and teachers had so much input into the curriculum. And really the – I think probably one of the real strengths of the college system was curriculum development that occurred and the participation – I mean, I don't know what happened after I left but certainly that was – teachers felt very involved, and they did, and they wrote their own curriculum and sought accreditation for it, and then got ahead and taught it. I mean, it's – it kind of was the absolute opposite of what I understand is increasingly a bureaucratic process that many teachers are complaining about now. I mean, I speak to a few teachers now and they just say well look, you know, the intrusion of the bureaucracy into their classroom teaching and the control mechanisms that are kind of coming down on them are just very discouraging.

Whereas certainly the college system did just the opposite, it was really quite exciting. You know, to move away from that idea of a centralised kind of curriculum that you taught and you kicked – you taught them to stand on the left leg this week and I taught them to stand on the right leg last week sort of thing. And so to be – yeah, that was very exciting I think.

Mr Haggar: **And with the – with the opening up of the system and the loss of people who had decided to stay with New South Wales, you're in a situation with significant promotions opportunities being opened up.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, yes.

Mr Haggar: **And although it still takes to the late '80s before we even get close to seeing females represented in the secondary principal's ranks.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yeah, well it – I mean, you had – you had to be fairly determined, I think, to get there, you know, and the women did eventually step up. But I think it did involve a bit of a change. I certainly – most – not all but most of the women who were supporting changes had not – were not really, initially, were not seeking promotion on their own behalf.

Mr Haggar: **Now that's one of the interesting elements is that so many of you – and I'll say you at this point – remained as classroom teachers, never applied for promotions positions.**

Ms Harasymiw: No, no. Well – I mean, as a group I think we were fairly committed to social change and wanted to engage with the issues, but we were not necessarily focused on a personal ambitious career. But gradually there were women emerged that were and were prepared to get in there and compete with the men, and do it effectively.

Mr Haggar: **And the union provided a vehicle for women generally to gain experience, knowledge and understanding of how the system worked and what it took to move into those positions of authority.**

Ms Harasymiw: Indeed, indeed. I mean, someone like Cheryl O'Connor got an invaluable insight and – and connections and, you know, all that kind of thing. You know, the union – the union provided, if you wanted a bureaucratic or a senior career within – within the teaching service, being active in the union was probably the equivalent of going to the best elite school that you could go to. Because tick, you got to know the players, you got to know the kind of the policies, you got to know the structures, you got to know, you know, what the agendas were coming up, all that kind of thing.

Mr Haggar: **And you also got the opportunity to practice your debating skills.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yep, yep, yep. But you know, just, you know, never underestimate the value – this is I suppose what elite private schools are supposed to offer, the value of actually getting to know people, you know. For this new kid on a committee of some sort with someone that's kind of got some sort of

bureaucratic position and get to know them, just on a low-key level, that is a valuable thing to have. And the union did provide incredible open opportunities to people who – who wanted that kind of experience. And I guess because it was a new union and because it was so open, that wouldn't – wouldn't have been so easy, I suspect, in New South Wales, partly because of the distance, the physical challenges, but also because of the much more entrenched traditions and views that would have existed.

Mr Haggar: **Cathy is quite interesting when I talked to her at length about those early years. She saw the ACT Teachers Federation as mirroring structures of the New South Wales TF, but because of its small size that was often quite inappropriate. And she sees her own record as a very positive one in, to use her term, modernising the union. We had for example the introduction of computers into the office and creation of things like the formal women's conference. But it's an interesting perspective because certainly if you're setting up your own union and you were familiar with New South Wales Teachers Federation, the first constitution, for example, just reflected what people knew from New South Wales.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, yeah. I think that's true but I still think that people wanted something different. I mean, that's why they bothered to set up in the first place. You know, if you're going to have it exactly the same why would you bother? I mean, people – people were engaged because they thought well, here is an opportunity to do something differently.

Mr Haggar: **And one of the interesting elements was the opposition of the New South Wales Teachers Federation early on to the creation of a separate union, and their opposition to the creation of separate secondary colleges.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, yes, yes. I really wasn't part of that but I can imagine – well I mean, you know, they were – they were still – they were still back defending seniority. I mean, I think it's true to some extent, that unions tend to mirror the bureaucracy that they serve. And , you know – New South Wales Department of Education and the New South Wales – the teachers union were a package.

Mr Haggar: Yes, yes.

Ms Harasymiw: And so too, I think the ACT Union was a package with a – with an ACT Schools Authority that was very influenced by the stuff that was coming out of the Schools Commission and they wanted something radical and then they wanted something different.

Mr Haggar: Yeah. I think Elizabeth McKenzie and her PhD, which is accessible on the union website, where she tracks the development of the system, emphasises the original parental motivation and then progressive union members coming in to support that, that led to – you know, from '66 through to '72 – led to the creation of our own separate system.

I was just going to – just change the subject for a moment. Of course you left teaching to go into the national vocational training...

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, I moved into the TAFE sector.

Mr Haggar: Yeah, into the TAFE sector. Can I have some of your observations about how you found that?

Ms Harasymiw: I found that a bit sad actually. The thing about – about school, and I suspect universities – is that they know what their package is, they know what they're supposed to expect – to produce. Now schools are supposed to produce kids that can read and write and then provide a selection system for some to go to university and some go somewhere else. That's their outcome, you know. They're very clear about that, it's not complicated. I mean – but poor old TAFE, it's a political arm of education and it's a dog's body. And so it – one year it gets funding, the next year all the funding's cut. One year it's in favour of this kind of model, and then the next year it's in favour of another model. You know it sort of – they were really hitting the TAFE structures when I started there.

Mr Haggar: You were there during the period – well, it's been continuous since then, of what they called contestability of funding so that, you know, you were opening up a private training market which of course 20-25 years later we now know, as was said at the time by the union,

would lead to low quality training, often false accreditation, and in some business models, absolute corruption of the training system.

Ms Harasymiw: Absolutely, absolutely. And this is what, you know, what happened. It was – I just sort of call it the political arm of education, poor old TAFE, and governments just use it any way they like. And in Victoria they were moving to a – to devolve things to colleges that came down to Melbourne. And of course once you got devolved things to colleges it meant the principals got paid more but it was much harder to drive any real social change because of central – you didn't have any sort of central...

Mr Haggard: You became a body in which you were putting out the money under certain defined guidelines.

Ms Harasymiw: That's right, that's right, yeah. And just bought – you bought certain courses and you didn't have the sense of trying to build up a group of students that might share something in common, or anything like that. It just – it just – it was just a factory, I think. And I think it broke the hearts of many of the TAFE teachers.

Mr Haggard: In terms of the language that came into play from this time, students were – started to be described as clients.

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, that's right. Yes, that's right, yes. So yeah, instead of seeing – like, I mean, when I went to university you were very much encouraged to be part of the culture and social life of the university and that was considered just as important part of, you know, as going to lectures. And I think there was probably some of that at TAFE colleges at one stage, but it certainly got very, very quickly destroyed. You know, TAFE colleges were just places where you came, you went, often the quality of the teaching was pretty poor. Everything seemed to be reduced to a certain kind of bits of rote learning, and you got chewed out at the end with a particular level of course and then you kind of came back and you did another level of course. And this was supposed to meet employer's needs.

You know, there was no sort of sense in which you said here is a 19 year old who's not going to university but he's going to do further training, what skills will that person need over their working life, and how will we package and

support it, which is a much more educational way of looking at it. It was much more a matter of employers need 'X', 'Y' and 'Z', you know.

Mr Haggar: **Alongside the casualization that much of the TAFE workforce of course it's been much harder to unionise the area than schools.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, yeah. Well again, that's – because the – you know, some of them worked split shifts. I mean, it was pretty terrible working conditions. And because of the political nature, I mean, we had it here, I don't know, about 10 years ago, the Liberal government just – just wiped – just withdrew funding from the Victorian system and people were sacked all over the place.

And in the small country town I'm living in there was the most beautiful facility, I think it's been built largely because of some National Party influence, you know, but it was a beautiful art room, really lovely. Well, it's been sitting empty now for five years because community groups can't afford to pay the cost of hiring it, and they no longer offer courses which are about the arts.

Mr Haggar: **The publicly funded courses, yeah.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yeah, which are about the arts. So, yeah, I mean – so I think – I think the TAFE system has really suffered. I know the government here – down here in Victoria is talking about wanting to re-establish it but they went a little bit too far and they were even offering them free courses, which might be attractive given that university courses have got so expensive.

Mr Haggar: **Well this takes us – this takes us back of course to the 1970s and the Whitlam government there.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, yes, that's right. As I say, I think that TAFE will always be the political – the political arm of education. You know, governments feel free to kind of withdraw, restructure, and it's not done over five or 10 years, it's done within 12 months, it's just so rapid, in a way they wouldn't dare touch schools and they wouldn't dare touch universities. You know, they will have agendas for change within those educational institutions but they know they've got to

move slowly, you know, they've got to carry a big part of the population with them, you know. Whereas TAFE just gets lumbered.

And it is hard to find – it is hard, I think, to bring from a union perspective. You've got to bring people together who've come from very different backgrounds, whereas, as you say, , in school teaching they are quite representative but also, it's still a fairly coherent group of people. I think with TAFE, if you looked at the cross section of TAFE teachers, it's a much bigger cross section of the community. It ranges from, you know, the kind of people who might have come out of the school system graduates, to panel beaters, to – you know, it's just enormous.

Mr Haggar: **Yeah, yeah, and of course so many of them, teaching a few hours in TAFE is a second job, and they don't have the sense of systemic commitment in many cases.**

Ms Harasymiw: Well they can't if they're casualised, and as you say a huge proportion of them were casualised. So yeah, I think – I mean, I find it quite interesting but I – you know, I feel sorry for – I have a number of friends who spent their lives working in TAFEs and I think they were very – they were very distressed at what they saw that was happening.

Mr Haggar: **Yes, I'm looking forward to talking to Megan Etheridge to get her perspective over the years.**

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, yes. Well I think it's even – even starker if you go to Melbourne or Sydney, in terms of what's being done. And, I mean, even as I say, I gave you that example of that art – art facility, well even the fact that this beautiful art facility was built in a small country town with a population of 12,000 is an example of the political kind of needs being met. As I say it's sad because the college there was supposed to close under the Kennett government but the National Party did a deal and kept it going and refurbished it, and it's just a beautiful building, it's just lovely. And now half of it stands empty.

Mr Haggar: **Yeah. Look Lyn, just to bring the discussion to a close. I mean, you've got an enormous perspective that, you know, starting, as you say, teaching in '66, and you saw the union as a very significant part of your working life. Is there a message that you'd like to give to young**

teachers starting out, and remembering of course that a lot of new recruits these days are people commencing a second or a third career?

Ms Harasymiw: Yeah, I think – look, I think their experiences are so different from mine, and they're coming from a different world, really. I mean, all I can say is that, you know, the union is probably the one organisation with democratic structures that they can access, and they can access it very easily, and that that's worth doing. But I don't – I don't think I would have anything to contribute in terms of what their issues might be or how they should be dealing with them. I mean, I'm too old. But yeah, certainly that's what – that's what I liked about the union was it was – you know, your workplace is not really democratic, you don't have access to democratic organisations where you feel as an individual that you can be part of something. Whereas I do think the union provides that, can give you a real sense that you can participate as an individual, for better or worse. And there are rascals there and there are some pretty impressive people there, so yeah.

Mr Haggar: And through your participation have the opportunity to influence systems and obviously, because it's education, the broader society as well.

Ms Harasymiw: Yes, yeah. Yeah I think – I think being active in a union is about – because it is democratic, is about one way to effect some aspects of social change, you know, and that certainly in my generation unions were a very important part of that. Whether they will continue to be part of it, although some of the scandals that are occurring now, can't but believe it's because they're – because the union isn't – has weakened. You know, there were some unions at the retail, right wing retail union, at one stage they sent around a – this was even in the '70s, sent around a thing for their members asking their female members what incentives they needed to give up work, because they still had a model of women at home, you know. So, God knows what their union was doing for them. And, you know, I certainly think that there were probably poorly paid, low skilled women workers who were not always well served by their union membership – by their union leaders, sorry. But, yeah, I just think that the women in the teaching service were – as I say, they were well educated, they were stropky and they were ready to move, and which they did.

CPM Reviews

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Mr Haggar: **And they did. Alright then, we might bring the recorded part of the discussion to a close. Thank you very much.**

Ms Harasymiw: Okay, okay.

[End of Transcript]