Celebrating 125 years

SSTUWA
State School Teachers' Union of WA

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SSTUWA 125: The union's headquarters from 1923-58 at 13 Murray Street in the city.

The SSTUWA of 1915-30 operated during a tumultuous time in Australian and world history. War had broken out in Europe and soon Australia's identity would be permanently shaped through the sacrifice of blood on the shores of Gallipoli. World War I would continue until 1918, and by war's end communities around the nation and in WA would be devastated by loss.

The proliferation of war memorials and honour boards in towns and in schools would be a testament to that. Soon after came another great disaster – the Flu Epidemic of 1919, a forgotten cataclysm largely overshadowed by the years of conflict and destruction prior.

The twin calamities would soon give way to the roaring 20s, as rebuilding nations ushered in a decade of relative prosperity and excess – only for that to come crashing down by the collapse of financial markets and the world economy. The Great Depression would soon cast its shadow over the globe. On the horizon another great existential threat loomed – the rise of nationalism and fascism, manifesting itself through increased militarisation of the great powers.

Closer to home, in July 1920 public teachers in WA joined with other public servants on a 20-day strike over pay and conditions. The Great Strike of 1920 ended on 30 July and was the longest strike in WA history at the time, almost bringing the country to a halt. The strike secured a pay raise for teachers, as well as raising the union to "a position of established recognition by the Government and Department (WA Teachers Journal, 10 August 1920).

The SSTUWA was housed at 13 Murray Street, near Royal Perth Hospital and St Mary's Cathedral, close by to what is now the Westin Hotel. Previously the union was at Austral Chambers and then Mitchell Chambers, on the corner of William and Murray Streets (where Perth Underground train station now sits below ground). It moved to 13 Murray Street in 1923 and remained there until 1958.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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