Celebrating 125 years

A tradition of securing equity



125 Years: The rear of the SSTUWA building on 13 Murray Street during this era.

The 1930s and 40s were book-ended by the Great Depression and another global conflict, which wrought enormous change to Australian society. By the end of World War II a new world would emerge, with such a change in modernity that it made the time before it seem markedly antiquated.

During this time the SSTUWA continued to build upon its status as the premier workers' representative body for government educators, while advocating for public education.

Issues of the day included the debate about whether universities should take over the training of teachers, with the SSTUWA preferring that training remain the responsibility of the Teachers' College, which would deliver the practical tutelage needed to teach – despite any ancillary academic benefits a tertiary education would provide.

The editorial from the WA Teachers' Journal of 10 February 1931 said: "Teaching needs especially that insight and familiarity which can only be acquired from contact with the child under the trained and experienced teacher, for teaching is an art – a difficult art which can be mastered only by those who give it their sedulous attention under expert guidance … we think the university ought to be content with our whole-hearted acknowledgement of the value of its services within its recognised province, and should not endeavour to encroach upon ground where it has little or no standing."

By Christmas of 1931 the government announced the closure of the Teachers' College (located in Claremont) due to the Great Depression, with plans to reopen once the economic crisis passed. (It would reopen in 1934.)

It was a move lamented by the union and it warned it would open the door for universities to enter the teacher training field, ultimately creating two classes of teaching graduates, one which may be more favoured in the workforce over the other. (Teacher training would not be fully ceded to universities until the 1980s.)

The debate showed how equity has always been a strong point of advocacy for the SSTUWA. This sense of equity was also

seen in other debates the union were involved in at the time, including a call for maximum class sizes to be brought down to 40.

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