

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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FIFTY YEARS ON FOR

THE AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS (D.O.G.S)¹

The 1960s were a turning point in the history of secondary education in Australia. The children of returned servicemen and the ‘New Australian’ immigrants— the generation known as the ‘Baby Boomers’ were knocking on doors of existing secondary schools. An increasing number of parents aspired to tertiary education for their offspring. Unlike Queensland, where private secondary education was subsidised through the scholarship system and the vast majority of children did not enter a secondary school until 1961, Victoria had offered a public secondary education to all children for several decades. But the right to a secondary education for every child can never be taken for granted.

In 1960 existing infrastructure in the public sector was aged, run down and insufficient ; trained teachers in short supply.

The public system expanded with limited funds. Private school systems demanded public funds to duplicate public facilities, offering ‘choice’ for the chosen. In the 1960s private school lobbyists succeeded in opening the Federal and State public treasuries to private, mainly religious education administrations.

The Australian Council for the Defence of Government Schools (D.O.G.S.) commenced informally in 1964, and was established on 26 April 1967. The first executive met in Room 416 of the Nicholas Building in Swanston Street Melbourne on 16 July 1968. This was the office of the Honorary Secretary of the Victorian Council of State Organisations, John Wood. The New South Wales organisation commenced in 1965 when Jack Dunn from the Victorian Council of State School organisations visited Sydney. Later, in November 1969, a New South Wales executive, representing both State school parents and members of the N.S.W. Teachers Federation was placed on a more

¹ The organisation sponsors a radio program on 3CR radio in Melbourne 8.55 on the am dial at 12 noon Saturdays. The program is podcast on the 3CR and DOGS webpage. The webpage is at www.adogs.info/ .

formal footing after candidates made a significant splash in the 1969 election.² The Tasmanian D.O.G.S. was established by University lecturers, teachers and parents in 1971.

The organisation has two objectives: the promotion and protection of public education and the separation of religion from the state. It accordingly opposes public funding of private education. The formation and activities of the D.O.G.S. have been closely connected with the problems confronting public secondary education in the last fifty years.

D.O.G.S. members in all States have taken part in elections,³ demonstrations outside wealthy schools,⁴ the DOGS High Court case,⁵ full page advertisements exposing inequities and lack of accountability in public funding⁶; the battle for Richmond Secondary College⁷; community radio

² In 1969 there were D.L.P. candidates in 10 of the 12 federal seats which DOGS contested in New South Wales and DOGS outpolled the D.L.P. in ten of these seats. Seven other electorates in other states were contested: these were Corio, Deakin, Henty, Marybynong and Melbourne Ports in Victoria; Griffith in Queensland, and Perth in Western Australia. Preferences were not allocated in New South Wales. In Victoria preferences were allocated to the ALP which, to the chagrin of the Federal Executive, opposed State Aid. A. Horton, 'DOGS in New South Wales 1969-1971' Chapter 12. D. A. Jecks (ed) *Influences in Australian Education*, 1974. Margaret Jones, 'DOGS are Putting Bite into the Election,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 October 1969.

³ J. Ely *Contempt of Court: Unofficial Voices from the DOGS Australian High Court Case 1981*, (2011), Dissenters Press, Publisher Arena, Melbourne, Chapters 5 and 6.

⁴ From 1969-1972 The NSW DOGS engaged in political demonstrations conducted by middle class parents and their children – and dogs. The Tasmanian DOGS held a demonstration at the grave of Andrew Inglis Clark, The Tasmanian Attorney General who drafted the Australian Constitution with what later became Section 116. 'Tomorrow: Day of Tribute to a great Tasmanian', *Saturday Evening Mercury*, 30 September 1972, 29; *NSWTF Journal, Education* 15 March, 1972; J. Ely, *op.cit.* Chapters 5 and 6;

⁵ M.J. Ely, *Erosion of the Judicial Process*
http://www.adogs.info/sites/default/files/docs/dogs_high_court_case.pdf and J. Ely *op.cit.*

⁶ For example, *The Age*: 12 November 1970; 27 November, 1972, 4; 16 May 1973, 10; 12 July 1973, 14; 12 December 1975, 12; 23 June 1977, 16; 2 December 1977; 5 December, 1977, 12; 3 May 1984, 18; 28 November 1984, 20; 1 May 1985; 30 August 1988, 22-23; 2 March 1998, 11; April 26, 2005; 27 March 2006; *The Herald*: 1 December 1972, 11; 11 December 1975, 38; *The Australian* : 10 December 1975, 5; 19 July 1985, 7; *Canberra Times*: 18 December 1980; 4 November 1983, 11; 6 April 1984, 9. Advertisements since this time did not deal with the Schools Commission.

programs⁸; and digital media.⁹ During the 1970s it was sometimes dangerous to take an anti-State Aid position in Victoria. Ray Nilsen, the President, and Lance Hutchinson, the Secretary of D.O.G.S. were fearless. So they went out in front.

Members believed that propping up the private sector with taxpayer funding would undermine the public sector and lead to inequalities in educational opportunity. The Gonski Report did not prove them wrong.

Members also considered that State Aid to religious schools contravened separation of religion and the state as enshrined in Section 116 of the Australian Constitution. They expended considerable energy and funds on what is known as the DOGS High Court case.¹⁰ For fifteen years, they took on the forces of the Australian state, major churches, and legal fraternity. They lost this particular case, but the dissent of Justice Murphy stands for another time¹¹. The saga of this case is told on the DOGS website and the more comprehensive history of the DOGS organisation is laid out in Jean Ely's *Contempt of Court: Unofficial Voices from the DOGS Australian High Court case 1981*.¹²

In the last fifty years D.O.G.S. members have consistently asked themselves the question: What kind of schooling would Australian children receive in the future? Comprehensive schooling, free, secular and universal, open to all children? Or fee paying private schooling, owned and controlled by religious or corporate authorities? and, What happens to education when religion becomes entangled with and is endowed by the State? They believed that Australian educational history indicated that a democratic country wishing to provide educational opportunities for all its children could only do so with a public system open to all. It could not be done with a competing, publicly subsidised Denominational system which divided or rejected children on religious, financial, or any other criteria. They note that countries like Finland have not proved them wrong.

⁷ Members of the DOGS attended and covered the occupation of Richmond State Secondary College on their 3CR program. They also underwrote the production of the book by S. Jolly, *Behind the Lines* in June 1996. (See Acknowledgement)

⁸ See 3CR, 8.55 on the am dial or go to website at <http://www.3cr.org.au/> and <http://www.3cr.org.au/dogs>

⁹ See website at www.adogs.info/

¹⁰ *Attorney-General (Vic); Ex Rel Black v Commonwealth* [1981] 146 CLR 559, 2 February 1981.

¹¹ <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/cases/cth/HCA/1981/2.html> Murphy J. J. Ely, op.cit. Appendix One, p.252

¹² J. Ely, *op.cit.*

LISTEN TO DOGS PROGRAM

ON 3CR

855 ON THE AM DIAL: 12.00 NOON SATURDAYS