

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 632#

Political Appointments Make for Lousy Administration

Public Education Needs Committed and Experienced Public Servants.

In the last 150 years Public Education has survived because its Founding Fathers in the nineteenth century identified and solved at least two of its major problems.

Problem One was financial security. This, they realised was only possible if public education was publicly funded – from taxpayer funds. This funding was only secure if the opposition – private religious monopolies – were not publicly funded. As a result public education thrived for approximately eighty years when State Aid to the private, religious sector was withdrawn. Since 1969 when direct grants were introduced public education has been systematically undermined. Supporters of public education and academics will not succeed in establishing a secure, first rate public system unless and until they stop romancing about ‘Needs’ policies and take a strong no-State Aid position.

Problem Two was the administrative problem. Founding administrators like William Wilkins in NSW and Tate in Victoria realised that only a strong centralised administration could ensure equality of educational opportunity for all children; and adequate support and supervision of public school teachers and principals. A centralised administration is also the only one that can provide proper accountability for public funds to a representative parliament. Without politically neutral, experienced administrators, democratic, representative government becomes an impossibility.

But, since the advent of State Aid and the growth of a highly centralised Catholic education administration which lobbies governments behind closed doors, centralised administrations of public education have been under constant attack. Many have been taken over by private school interests and profiteers. Administrations have been decentralised, and schools and teachers isolated into private/public partnerships. Inequalities have increased exponentially and school principals and teachers placed under crushing workloads. In Victoria, parents have watched in disbelief as] corruption has been uncovered in the rump of what was once a proud, experienced bureaucracy. Australia once led the world in this regard. Why have we regressed?

The only way forward is to go back and solve these problems again: withdraw State Aid to private religious schools and the re-establish a committed and experienced centralised administration.

What is now happening in Victoria in particular is merely following the privatisation corruption that is being unearthed in the United States. Consider the following case study from Diane Ravitch's blog from Massachusetts in the USA at <http://dianeravitch.net/2015/12/16/massachusetts-a-stunning-conflict-of-interest/>

Massachusetts: A Stunning Conflict of Interest:

EduShyster was alerted by a confidential tip to the possibility that Jim Peyser, the State Secretary of Education, [remains a director of an organization](#) that lobbies for more charter schools.

She checked public records and learned that Peyser is still listed as a director of "Families for Excellent Schools." This is an organization of hedge fund managers, millionaires, and billionaires who lobby for privately managed charter schools.

"the Secretary of Education, Jim Peyser sets education policy for the state and also votes on said policy. And as a director for the charter school advocacy group Families for Excellent Schools, and its 501 (c) (4) lobbying arm, Peyser is seeking to influence the very state policy that he is then voting upon. In other words, he is lobbying himself. As the Secretary of Education, Jim Peyser sets education policy for the state and also votes on said policy. And as a director for the charter school advocacy group Families for Excellent Schools, and its 501 (c) (4) lobbying arm, Peyser is seeking to influence the very state policy that he is then voting upon. In other words, he is lobbying himself..."

"But wait, there's more

"If it sounds like our Secretary of Education has his hands full, both lobbying and being lobbied, consider that Father Peyser wears yet another cap these days. He is also the defendant in a class-action lawsuit vs. the state's charter cap, defending the very cap that he is working feverishly, whilst wearing one of his other caps, to lift. The obvious question: how does he do it all? Followed by: what size hat does Peyser wear? Followed by: doesn't Massachusetts have some kind, ANY kind of, conflict of interest law? Alas, I'm informed that its nearly as toothless as our public records law."

An article by Chris Aulich in the *Conversation* of December 11, 2015 indicates that some Australian academics are beginning to discuss the dangers in politicisation of the public service. However, one wonders whether in Australia, we are only interested in tinkling at the edges.

A democracy depends on an independent and fearless public service – and a strong public education system. All three are under threat when the public service is politicised. An oligarchy with widespread monopolies and corruption is the result when basic lessons of logic and history are ignored.

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See <https://theconversation.com/yes-minister-how-political-appointments-tip-the-scales-of-fearless-advice-49806>

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