

## Story of our union banner

May 02, 2018

There are interesting narratives associated with every aspect of Federation's centenary marching banner, unveiled at the May Day Toast, held at Federation's Surry Hills headquarters on 1 May.

**Ebenezer Dash** appears on the banner, having played a significant role in Federation's formation and as a leader willing to speak out when Government policy ran counter to the interests of the teaching profession.

In 1922, the then education minister threatened Dash with disloyalty and possible breaches of Regulation 21 (that an officer "shall not publicly comment upon the administration of any department of the State"). Dash had made public comments critical of the reintroduction of secondary school fees by the incoming National Party government. He was Federation President at the time, but still a teacher on leave without pay from the Department.



The then Minister for Education, Albert Bruntnell, sent the following reply: "I noted with no small degree of surprise and regret that you, personally, and the Teachers Federation under your presidency, have seen fit to publicly criticise one of the administrative acts of the Minister ... without first representing your views to the official head of your Department ... is extremely discourteous to me and unworthy of the high traditions of the Public Service of the State ... Whether you and your Federation criticised Cabinet action in the matter of High School Fees are, or are not, guilty of a breach of Regulation 21 of the Public Service Act is a concern of the Board."

Dash made the letter the principal item in his presidential report to the next meeting of the NSW Teachers Federation Council.

"You will notice that the letter attacks me personally and the Federation generally. Serious as the accusation/charges are against me personally, they are more serious to the Federation. They strike at its very existence! If the Minister's dictum is to be accepted, then we are plunged back again into the period when any officer who dared open his/her mouth to protest, or to join a teachers' organisation, was marked for departmental displeasure and victimisation ... Teachers' organisations have been granted the right to criticise any proposal concerning education in the state ... They have used the right freely, their criticisms have been constructive, and the administrative officers of the Department, knowing this, have over and over again called for consultation before launching a new scheme ... What alternative is offered? Practically this: You must not express an opinion until the Minister has censored your discussion, and you must put forward nothing that does not meet with official approval. Your meetings and your annual conference must be held in secret. You must submit your agenda papers for censorship, you must not warn the public, whose servants you are, of dangers that are threatening ... If you are satisfied to do this! Then go further and inscribe on your collars the old inscription 'Gurth thrall to Cedric' (be a slave to a pig farmer)."

Dash's forthright statement was warmly applauded and supported by teachers, who were anxious to see that the free education principles of the Public Instruction Act drawn up by Henry Parkes were maintained. It was because of this support and public opposition to the policy itself that no further action was taken against Dash as an individual.

**Margaret Miller**, a significant woman in Federation's history, is also portrayed on the banner.

Miller was twice elected unopposed as President of the Infants' Mistresses' Association, and played a prominent part in the movement for increasing the pay of women teachers. Miller was a suffragette and, at the first conference, a prominent speaker in the debate for equal pay — the first rule change to the objects of the new union.

Miller was a well-known and energetic member of Council and Executive of Federation, and took her place and did her share on various sub-committees needed to carry through the work of the union.

*Education*, May 15, 1920, described the promotion of "Miss Inspector Miller" and her personal and professional attributes.

"It is not too much to say that no more popular promotion has been made of recent years than that of Miss Margaret Miller from the Headmistress-ship of North Newtown Infants to the position of Inspector of Infants Schools ... For the last ten years, after a wide experience in Girls' and Infants' Schools in country and city, Miss Miller has held a dual position, being Lecturer to the students in training for Infant School Work and to those at Hereford House, in addition to her duties at Newtown. Thus she has exerted a far-reaching influence; all over the State will be found those who have been inspired and aided in their work by her enthusiasm and love for her profession ... Under Miss Miller's guidance a large amount of experimental work has been carried out at North Newtown, by which the whole State has benefited. Last year, particular attention was paid to Manuscript writing and Phonetics in relation to speech training, while for seven years experimentation in methods relative to the teaching of retarded children has been in progress with most valuable results ... The relations between the Mistress and her Staff cannot be overlooked, for they were practically ideal. Of each member Miss Miller made a close personal friend, with the result that all were eager to work with her towards a desired end ... There was no task too heavy to undertake if Miss Miller considered the cause of Education required it."

## **Design features**

A common colour palette of a century ago — red, white and blue (think the Australian flag, Union Jack and many marching banners) — factor in the marching banner's design. These colours are also a trait of Federation's crest. For the marching banner, the union's crest is modified with the words "100 years of teacher unity", the theme for Federation's centennial celebrations.

A 1920s typeface on a curling ribbon design broadcast other words associated with Federation: Strength, Knowledge, Support and Advocacy.

Shaking hands depict the solidarity between our First Peoples and their white brothers and the union's commitment to Aboriginal education, both as an issue of inclusivity and the pursuit of equitable educational outcomes for all students.

The backdrop is a replication of artwork featured on the cover of the very first issue of *Education*, in November 1919, by Herbert W. Moffitt, then a teacher in the service and sub-editor of *Education* but who, decades later, became a judge of the District Court.

In keeping with many union banners produced after the 1908 May Day parade, where silk banners suffered due to a particularly wild storm, Federation's banner has been created on canvas. Artist Birgitte Hansen has used paint to create the design.