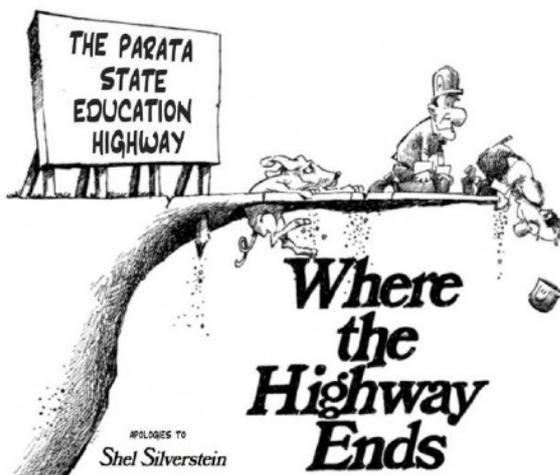




97

Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkonnet.wordpress.com>

Attack! 97 She's resigned: looking back with despair



My early predictions for National and education following the 2008 elections, in the postings 'Smoke and mirrors', were that education would be raided for funding as National in government is always intent on saving money from education to fund its three-yearly tax cuts. And as far as the teacher organisations were concerned I said they would swing from being tigers with Labour to pussy cats with National.

The origins of Parata's dramatic collapse were inherent in Tolley's preceding reign but were dramatically forecast in a 2011 TV 1 pre-election debate between Phil Goff and John Key.

In a 2011 posting I expressed it like this:

'In last night's debate John Key came out with a shocker about schools, a shocker we should make sure haunts him throughout his remaining years in

office: He said (and I need help here with the exact wording) that "[Schools, teachers] are letting down [society, New Zealand, children, us]." The comment was made in the context of 33% of Maori children leaving secondary school with low level qualifications.'

'It was said as an aside, making it almost certain it was a true expression of his feelings.'

'Let us settle for him saying "Schools are letting New Zealand down."'

'After all I've written on the National government and education, it might surprise some that I was shocked, but I was. For the elected head of a government to come out and say such a thing is without parallel in our political history and, I suspect, the political history of comparable countries.'

'No ifs no buts – New Zealand schools are letting New Zealand down.'

'In the last thirty years in Western countries, accountability has mainly been used against schools for their "failure" to achieve the utopian impossibility of having children from straitened circumstances achieve as well as children from privileged ones. The fantastical pressing for ever rising accountability has been used to justify ever greater political and bureaucratic intervention and led to a breakdown in the trust in public schools.'

'John Key you are, in the context of being a New Zealand prime minister for the public school children and teachers of New Zealand, a scumbag.'

[When interviewed on TV 3 I used this description of Key along with some other words of doubtful taste, which were cut, only to reappear on 'Jono and Ben', which was to make me famous with my grandchildren and a source of envy that continues to this day with their friends.]

[I was truly taken aback with Key's comments. As it happens, next day Key was to appear in Cambridge outside the town hall and I was heading to Papakura to speak at an NZEI graduation ceremony. I determined to confront him on the way and ask him if he wanted me to report his view to the young teachers to be honoured at the ceremony and the South Auckland teachers in attendance. Then to my

dismay (in the sense of a lost opportunity) I found Karapiro School, which my grandchildren attended, was to be the school providing the welcoming party (Louise Upston's children also went to the school). So to avoid what David Walliams might today have written as 'Gangsta Granddaddy' I reluctantly absented myself.]

The 2011 posting then proceeded to speculate on who the minister of education might be and how things might work out.

I said:

'It now appears that Anne Tolley has run out of puff and credit with teachers and that Hekia Parata was the likely replacement.'

'The Parata whanau is a formidable one which thrives on antagonism. The capability of Parata family members is beyond question, their open-mindedness very much in. Hekia Parata's charisma, intelligence, drive, East Coast ego, and oratorical skills, also her personal variability, will make dealing with her, in my view, even more of a challenge than dealing with Tolley's frumpishness. Parata will be seen as having exuberant charm overlaying unwavering ruthlessness. Two characteristics to look out for are personal vindictiveness and being enamoured with power – the crunching joy of it. When that joy goes, she will. So let's drain it.'

'Parata family members are red-hot supporters of national standards. And, unlike Tolley, who only came to understand them, Parata family members do understand them, albeit from a mainly secondary perspective, they just refuse to countenance arguments opposing them. Any hope that she might be open to change is beyond dangerously naïve.'

'My prediction is that having thrown a bucket of water over Tolley, we will very soon be wishing all we could see of Parata is a pair of red shoes.'

This 2011 posting statement accurately predicts the behaviour and performance of the worst minister of education ever and the reasons for her collapse.

It was five years of personal vindictiveness and being enamoured with power.

Her way of proceeding was a complete unwillingness to consult, to properly negotiate, then to rub it in by using cronies for support – the more incompetent the better, which she had a hand in promoting both within education and the bureaucracy – also utterly craven organisations, some of them big, many miniscule, given a rampantly free say in the irrelevant forums that were Parata's conception of negotiation. This was Parata's way of rubbing her opponents', as she saw them, and teacher organisations', face in it. What crunching joy she got from that.

Then there were the bunch of academic cronies, most from Auckland University, who regularly popped up within the ministry and the education review office to provide some kind of justification for policies that are clearly rubbish. You can sense their exuberant participation in the formation of the pernicious review office indicators. (There is no evidence that imposed indicators work except as way of killing joy in teachers' hearts.)

If I despise any individuals in education today, then it is those individuals, those privileged academics (not to downplay their efforts to get there), siding with the powerful against those who should be able to, desperately need to be able to, trust in the integrity of academics. Are the academics completely blind to context and power relations in Parata's education system? The role of universities as I see it is the search for the truth, with the emphasis always on the search. To my mind, the academics have betrayed the ideals of universities and in that way degraded an institution that has never been more needed as a source of integrity. They should have suffered teachers and children to come to them and lived up to what was expected of them, rather than siding with a repellent mixture of vindictiveness and exploitation.

Not forgetting the Education Council, the perfect symbol of neoliberal teacher representation: individuals led by a pathetic aging ex-secondary principal, a lizard sunning on a rock, droning out anodyne, ingratiating education trivia, always slyly sidling to unload new bureaucratic impedimenta on principals and teachers.

And definitely not forgetting the cruelty inflicted on dozens of principals, a few who fought and were in the headlines, but most who were on their own, who suffered the unbelievable agony of false accusation and undeserved disgrace. And what of their families? There is no evidence in her behaviour Parata recognised the pain inflicted on others, playing as she did each situation like a chess game, she in charge of the board, ruthless throughout.

And when things went wrong, when robbed of her crunching joy of impositional power, she lashed out at her staff.

What a five years of crashing failure! The 2012 attempt to increase class sizes which, if successful, would have devastated children's learning, especially children of the poor and children with special needs; the idea of performance pay – and the back down; charter schools even though she now hints she is opposed to

them; and oh my god! Christchurch – this was bureaucratic sadism; the insistence on large open spaces which teachers are struggling to make work and the towering administration buildings which are a symbolic declaration of hierarchy; the reduction in real terms of primary school funding and, within that, funding being wasted on harmful impositions and bureaucratic-heavy schemes; the badmouthing and scapegoating of schools, especially primary schools; the incompetent and haphazard way technology has been introduced; the official support for intensified phonics; the dumping of successful Maori programmes like Te Kotahitanga; the bureaucratic cluster idea, sponsored by the Treasury, which is struggling to get off the ground and is proving hugely expensive to administer; the drop in achievement in international testing regimes (for what they are worth); the revelations about the drop in achievement as revealed in the machinations around NCEA; the degradation of professional development; and now a return to bulk funding (though it is sure to be withdrawn) and performance pay, and a form of funding special needs which will leave tens of thousands of children unsupported; and underlining all this (especially for Parata) the failure to genuinely lift Maori achievement.

I informed my readers in 2011 that with Hekia Parata they would have revealed an individual with exuberant charm overlaid with unwavering ruthlessness expressed in two dominant characteristics – personal vindictiveness and being enamoured with power: meaning the more people reasoned and challenged her, the more she enjoyed destroying them – the crunching joy of it.

But, I added, 'when that joy goes, she will' and she has.

We now await the next Key government ministerial expression in education of: 'Schools are letting New Zealand down' and the next education highway to nowhere.

