

Thursday 18th November 2010

Attention: Senate Select Committee On Scrutiny Of New Taxes

Re: Enquiry Into Proposed Student Fees

Dear Mesdames and Messieurs,

I write as a former student politician a sometime member of the University of Melbourne Students' Representative Council - in 1980 - to object to the government attack on political and academic freedom and democracy represented by the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010. I was last a university student in 2001 undertaking a one year graduate refresher diploma at Swinburne University of Technology.

I am not a right wing anarchist. I recognise that there can be appropriate and fair taxation measures, fees, and charges.

However, this undemocratic and pernicious piece of legislation would open the doorway to the more extreme revolutionary left students to get funds to fund their clubs and societies, debate their extreme points of view, organise to storm the student representative councils established pursuant to the guidelines mentioned in section 19-67, publish their views in student newspapers and radio and on the Internet, et cetera, et cetera. The whole bill organises student representation in a bureaucratic way under the supervision of university administrations, and does not include democratic safeguards. Letting the minister draft the guidelines rather than putting express democratic safeguards in the bill is dangerous.

I do not object to Student Representative Councils per se. If organised with compulsory voting with a required option of "No One" candidates to deal with the case when only revolutionaries stand, as sometimes used to be the case on small campuses in the 1970's, then one could imagine sensible debate and moderate politics on campus leading to a better world. The Student Representative Council model is my view a much better model than any Student Union model. The only members are the elected students, so the issue of compulsory membership does not arise.

However, this hasty, ill considered, badly drafted piece of legislation needs substantial and major amendment before being acceptable to ordinary students from the silent majority.

I do not think the annual tax required to be paid by students to fund ballot papers, policy speeches, minutes and any like requirements for student representation need be any more than \$25 per year. And to prevent the revolutionaries re-starting their old ways of ballot box stuffing, require that the Australian Electoral Commission be contracted to hold the ballots to ensure free and fair elections.

Too many of the revolutionary left have extreme views. Where do such views lead? If one gives in to the argument that the existence of the legal and medical professions oppresses those students who fail high school and end up in unskilled working class jobs, and one organised a violent revolution that led to the wrong sort of leaders gaining power in their name, one get a situation which got out of control as Kampuchea's did and these two professions might be massacred together with other snobbish elites such as the aristocracy. I know most people of peace and goodwill do not want this to happen, even if the reforms they envisage and support are very radical.

Unfortunately such scum float to the top; therefore voluntary student unions will also prove unsatisfactory as only a tiny minority will join - the politically already active - and voluntary student unions are not worth having.

The Bill should really be blocked. Another new Bill in the right terms should be drafted, and urgently. The right of ordinary students to be represented by democratic means is important to me, just as federal and state members of parliament and local councilors represent their electorates also.

Yours Sincerely,

Andrew Oliver (copy with signature to follow by post.)