

VSU AND ME.

A submission to the committee overseeing the ‘Inquiry into the Provisions of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005’

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My lord, there is so much I could say about why I think this legislation will have a disastrous effect on Higher Education in Australia that I want to scream incoherently and jump up and down. This legislation slices away at the very core of balance within our Universities and deeper into the core of balance in our society as a whole.

This balance is about the facilitation of equal representation for all the diverse views in our society. It is about systems and laws that protect dissent from steamrolling by the dominant powers, no matter how squeaky soft or roaring loud this dissent is or how it's conveyed. This balance says that dissent is vital as a reflective tool for any society, as a checking of the version of progress of the dominant power.

We know that this balance is vital because we have seen the massive suffering that occurs when dominant culture moves forward unchecked. We see it in genocides and in the brickwork of human rights abusers all over the world.

That's why we have a democracy. To enshrine the balance of the many voices in this country's governance and direction.

So why does the government seek to silence this vital function of dissent in one of it's most respected forms? Because the voices of students throughout history should be respected, they have oft been at the front of battles for many of the rights that this country holds dear. Shouldn't we instead applaud the courage and energy of students, even if we disagree with their ideas, because if we do not encourage energy and movement then what do we encourage. Perhaps blank acceptance and isolation from citizenship. What sort of country will be populated by those characteristics?

Maybe you think this is hysteria, that VSU is just about making services more efficient or something equally innocuous? In fact the WA example tells a different story, that no matter what tiny terms this legislation is coined in the very real result will be the destruction of organised student voice. The destruction of a resource base that supports some of the best young minds in this land to question our entrenched ways and to propose new ways. Now why would we want to discourage this clear path to societal progress? To evolution even?

For me the well documented and powerful evidence that VSU will destroy services is compelling but not nearly as much as the idea of the destruction of a key voice of dissent. Government's role is to listen to all community voices and to provide opportunities for inclusion at every level. Not to silence opposition and create a land in their own image.

I vow to fight for the right of all voices of dissent to exist. Not for them to gain sway but just to have an equal hearing, no matter what the size, shape and colour of the voices. The fight for me begins with VSU because I am a student and I have tasted the wind on campus, the wind that speaks of many battles for diminishing student rights and services. Student Unions may not always be perfect but they are the central organising body for students and without this body there will be no-one to provide information and resources to fuel students in their questioning.

The eager, creative, questioning voices that have so much to offer society will be starved. I ask, I shout at, I jump up and down at the senate and say, in the name of integrity, don't support this starvation.