

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
Legislation Committee

**Inquiry into the provisions of the Higher
Education Support Amendment
(Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees)
Bill 2005**

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To the Members of the Senate Inquiry Committee;

As a student at Swinburne University of Technology (SUT) and proud member of the Swinburne Student Union (SSU) I am writing to you as an expression of my disgust at the Government's attempt to silence community dissent and prevent the ability of students and individuals mobilise opposition and a removal of the inherent power of collective organisation by implementing the proposed legislation, in it's current format, in relation to Voluntary Student Unionism. Currently; although payment of General Service Fee are compulsory and 60% of this fee is redistributed to the SSU by SUT, a Conscientious Objection Clause allows for students to opt not to become a (paid/paying) member of the SSU if they are ideologically opposed to Student Unionism. The Government has chosen to use benign and misleading terminology such as 'Voluntary Student Unionism' and the rhetoric of choice; whilst

implementing measures designed to deny or reduce choices and options that are made available to students.

I am an Undergraduate student, completing a dual-major Bachelor of Arts (Media/Politics) and have found the SSU invaluable for providing a range of opportunities and experiences that SUT cannot, or does not provide; including student newspapers and publications (The Swine and Tabula Rasa) and student media production (3SSR and SwinTV) in addition to the range of clubs and societies, which allow for student life and campus culture to become more engaging, and ultimately are of benefit to students, both as individuals and as members in a diverse and vibrant community.

As the Hawthorn Campus Chair of the Swinburne Student Union, democratically elected by the student body, is extremely gratifying to facilitate and implement programs and policies which are of direct benefit to students, and to then witness the positive impact firsthand; as exemplified by long-held tenet, 'Student Control of Student Affairs'. As students and student representatives we are ideally placed to identify and implement necessary change; and whilst I concur that many in Government regard this as politicising education and 'politicking', I do not concede this influence to be negative. Democracy requires discourse; which may inevitably necessitate change, as the case of Student Rights and Advocacy; and whilst this process is inherently political, in its' attempt to question and subvert the status quo; the overall effect this has, both at the micro and macro level of student and University life is beneficial rather than detrimental.

I find it ironic and tinged with hypocrisy that many of Parliamentarians who have spoken staunchly against, or actively denied, the multiple and multifaceted benefits derived from Universal Student Unionism began their own political careers, and honed their collective talent for mendacious sophistry, through membership of Student Unions.

United; we are strong. Divided; we shall all fail.
Thankyou for your consideration,
Love and Light
Sunshine and Solidarity

Petra Miliankos