

Submission

to

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

Submitter: Mairi Neil

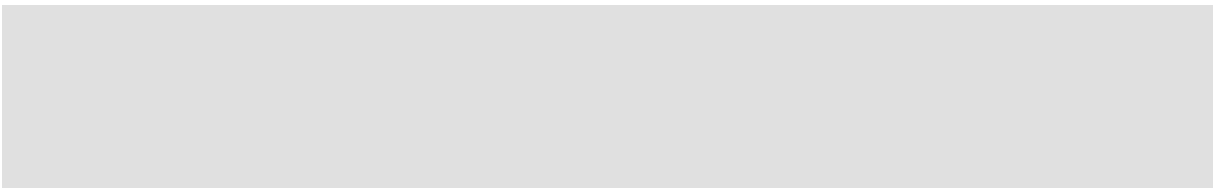
Organisation: Southern Branch Union of Australian Women (Victoria)

Address:

Phone:

Fax:

Email: mairi@ozemail.com.au



Submission to the 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

Submitted by Mairi Neil on behalf of the Union of Australian Women Southern
Branch mairi@ozemail.com.au

The Role of the Union of Australian Women

The Union of Australian Women is a national non-party political organization, formed in 1950 to work for the status and wellbeing of women in a peaceful and environmentally safe world.

In the 1950s the dominant view was that women's place was in the home, with children. At the same time, they were welcome in the factories as a source of cheap labour. There was no day-long child care. Whole suburbs were without kindergartens and libraries. Equal Pay was opposed. Contraceptive advice was difficult to obtain. Abortion was a crime. Indigenous Australians were not citizens. White Australia ruled supreme. The Cold War was at its height.

In these times UAW women courageously and consistently fought for:

- *the right for women to work and receive equal pay*
- *child care and pre-school education*
- *a living wage*
- *racial and sexual equality*
- *the rights of indigenous people*
- *disarmament, peace, non-violence*
- *fertility control*

UAW women have been actively campaigning for 50 years, and have been leaders in many related activities. They have networked and co-operated with women's groups from all areas of society on social issues, and at an international level. They have supported trade union campaigns, made submissions to the Arbitration Commission and to various Senate inquiries. They have lobbied on many issues that greatly influence our lives for the better. They have taken to the streets to campaign, to collect signatures, to ensure that a progressive, feminist viewpoint is heard.

Many of our members have taken advantage of the opportunity to return to tertiary education as mature age students, others are supporting children and grand children in their endeavours to obtain higher education.

The Tangible Effects of The Bill

*The introduction of the Higher Education Support Amendment Bill will have a devastating affect on women currently attending university or those with aspirations to do so. At the March meeting of the Southern Branch of the UAW the 30 members present signed and posted protest letters to the Education Minister informing him of our fears. **(It is interesting to note that to date not one member has received a reply – perhaps the Minister is having difficulty justifying such an ideologically based and vindictive piece of legislation?)***

Despite the notion of equality between the sexes and the change in attitude of society spearheaded by feminism, women are still disadvantaged. Minority groups within the collective such as indigenous, migrant, mature age, lesbian, international and women requiring childcare, health advice and general support need the advocacy and support provided on university campuses by women's officers and

other student council representatives. This advocacy and support plus the many services that contribute to the wellbeing and health of women students will not be provided if this bill is passed.

Student Unionism is necessary

Currently, the University environment is encouraging not only enlightenment but empowerment. We are educating future citizens but also future leaders – whether in the business, academic, health, welfare or any number of fields in society. Student Unionism and the ability for all students to aspire to or become student office bearers is a fundamental part of democracy as we know it in this country. Many current political leaders from all political parties, not just the ‘Left’ side of politics were student activists. This experience we believe has been important for our democracy and should continue. The atmosphere, events, activities and exposure to a vibrant and diverse campus, not only creates a happier and healthier student body but advances intellectual thought and discussion. Society needs to encourage young people to be active thinkers not only for the present but for the future.

The implementation of the Higher Education Support Amendment Bill will destroy most student media across the country, many creative arts and sports projects, deny students welfare and health advice, social support networks, childcare facilities and choice (a word the Minister has used a lot) of experiencing activities and being exposed to ideas that have been part of university life and the fabric of our society for generations. There will be many workers and service providers who will lose jobs and contracts if this bill succeeds in its current form. Has the government considered those who will lose their jobs?

Evaluation of the Arguments

Many argue that the implementation of this bill will merely see a reorganisation of services provided to students. We live in a society that appears to glorify ‘user pays’ as the only system - this concerns the Southern Branch of the UAW. We believe there is no place for that philosophy in tertiary education. The right to access tertiary education should be universal and a strong well-resourced and vibrant tertiary sector will indeed make us ‘the clever country’. We should not look at tertiary education as a marketplace or in purely economic terms. Our society could not function if only those who used a facility paid for it – we trust the government to share our taxes and provide services – roads are provided whether we own a car, hospitals are supported regardless of whether we are healthy, schools are built even if we are childless.

The passing of the Higher Education Support Amendment Bill will have a disastrous effect on student general services on campus and many important services will be abolished.

Friday, 17 June 2005