

MCSI - Education or Mind Control?

This place is a bit of a wild card entry into the world of academia. It wouldn't be a problem, this sort of institution is to be expected, but for the fact that the subjects count for credit points. Because of this the usual rules of academia should apply. The alternative calendar has not received any questionnaires returned for MCSI subjects. Whether this is

due to apathy or the mere insularity of the subjects we are unsure. Questions remain, however, as to the quality of these courses from an academic standards perspective, mainly subject matter, textbook and assessment procedure. Put simply, we remain to be convinced that a student can pass a subject if they fundamentally disagree with the line pushed by the



lecturer. If independent, critical thought is at odds with the unquestioned assumptions of the markers, what legitimacy can MCSI have academically? We suppose these questions will be resolved gradually as students appeal poor grades on matters of substance, dogma or opinion. Reading the subject descriptions in the University Calendar, most of these sound like Creative Leisure, Community College or Sunday School courses rather than academic subjects. There is not *even* a comparative religion course, and the subjects are not even pluralist.

MCSI at Macquarie is the only place in the world where christian courses count for credit points. MCSI was shocked to discover that the university does not count MCSI courses as part of your grade point average, as it had been led to believe, in fact they were paying for the fact that they would. As a result, your grades on your end of semester results will only show a pass or fail rather than the marks given to you by MCSI. MCSI is in negotiation with the university to change this situation. It is also negotiating for the introduction of an MA.

Courses at MCSI are not HECS eligible. This means that there are up front fees for what are essentially undergraduate subjects at Macquarie. MCSI pays part of these fees to the university ostensibly for the processing and administration charge for the

service of loading MCSI students onto the admin computers. The amount they pay is as yet undisclosed, but what is clear is that not just corporations but cults as well can buy their way into academic programs and write their own corporate/cult content that becomes examinable undergraduate curriculum. This is a tidy money spinner not only for the university but for SAM as well, as MCSI pays rent to SAM for their offices at a rate we imagine to be bargain basement judging from the fact that last year's SAM President was lamenting not charging them more.

There is a \$400 fee difference between taking a subject to count for credit points and taking the subject without it counting for credit points. This would seem to indicate that MCSI pays the university \$400 per student per subject. But there is no reason why the real figure could not be much higher than that. Christianity is a multi-billion dollar worldwide multinational



business, or businesses. There is no reason why we should not view MCSI lecturers as missionaries, Macquarie students as natives. Getting students to make their christianity more ubiquitous and coherent makes great business sense, as does putting christian teachers into schools. The space now occupied by the MCSI used to be an abandoned Commonwealth Bank

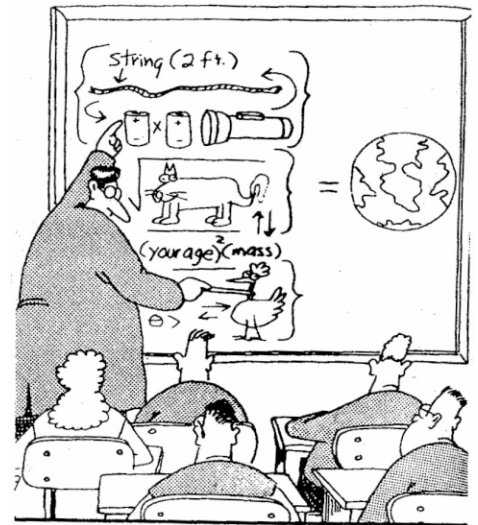
branch, a broom cupboard, which is now making money again. Its a shame the Union cannot divert more of the christian loot toward student facilities.

At MCSI, students can choose to be subjected to such hard core mind control as “how various aspects of daily life - including family, friendship, study, work and recreation - can become occasions for discerning and reflecting the presence of God”, all for valuable credit points! Subjects look at the “conversations” going on in just about any area, from family, to money and sex, to justice and globalisation. What they do not look at are the “discourses” involved in these issues. The distinction here is important as an investigation of discourse must necessarily refer to discourses of power and authority, and christian studies is unable to withstand such examination due to the fact that christian studies unilaterally substitutes the bible for objectivity in an amusing slight of hand. If the discourses involved in the teaching of christian studies were brought to the surface, widespread disenchantment would surely follow.

The textbook for all this is the bible. MCSI subjects purport to be taking “a biblical perspective”. While this begs the question “which bible”, more interesting is the way MCSI treats the bible as a singular stable, coherent entity, and goes further by treating christianity in the same way. This is problematic as curriculum is in the position of having to treat various historical myths and discarded philosophical constructs as current fact and data. This is a cancer on the whole body of teaching due to the cultural baggage of



faith which students arrive in the course carrying. This is supposedly not a re-education organisation, so until MCSI starts to introduce courses like “The Early Popes” or “Synod Politics 101”, or “Franciscans vs. Dominicans, the real story” MCSI courses are condemned to the academic level of north shore chin wagging. But it is serious due to the influence of people like Saint Jerome, Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine on today’s popular views on the nature of god. In this regard, several AHST subjects at Macquarie already cover this material. The problem for MCSI is a philosophical one as without utilising the residual dogmatic baggage of students, lecturers will have to resort to reciting and interpreting the actual letter of the bible, and in fact be delivering sectarian sermons rather than lectures. It is outrageous that such a racist, sexist and homophobic textbook could be approved for use at a university.



Creationism explained

An interesting area of study available is “the integration of christian perspectives with the vocation of school teaching”. This enables students enrolled in a dip. ed. to add an MCSI certificate in Christian Education to their degree. If there is room in the prerequisite schedule of education students they can substitute regular courses for christian courses and still get credit points. They can also add the certificate to their degree after completing their other subjects. This certificate requires additional unpaid prac teaching hours in a christian school on top of required unpaid prac teaching hours for TEP subjects. These teaching subjects can be cross credited to other institutions, so wherever you are studying, if you want to be accredited as a teacher and work in a christian school, they have a monopoly on your future. Better pay up front!

To see the real agenda of MCSI, check out the links from www.mcsi.edu.au. It will come as no surprise to many that MCSI is in fact the intrusion of fanaticism into what traditionally has been respectable knowledge based on an international community of thinkers. That Macquarie has allowed fundamentalists to buy their way into this community is an international disgrace. The Academic Senate has approved all MCSI courses. With the accreditation extending to the Grade Point Average the farce will be complete. This sudden malleability of academic standards gives a sinister implication to our slogan “The Innovative University”.



STUDENTS BEING FORCED TO PAY UP FRONT AS YOU LEARN, AS EXTORTION RACKET TAKES HOLD IN TERTIARY COMPUTING EDUCATION!

IT BEGINS - \$10,000 upfront fees the new University Admissions criteria.

Prospective Information Technology students have been replying to television and newspaper advertisements offering "earn as you learn" I.T. jobs through www.itdegree.com.au, which have been proved to be anything but. This brazen leap into the future of private university education at government institutions is taking place at universities at which there is no student representative body, and which are not affiliated to the National Union of Students. But not only do these degrees not make sense from a public education perspective, they are a rip off by any consumer standard as well.

- Students must pay **ten thousand dollars up front** to enroll in the course.
- Dimension data have no entry criteria but the ability to pay.
- Students who do not have the money now are encouraged to **borrow the money at commercial interest rates.**
- Despite the fact that students are undergraduates they are **not eligible for HECS.**
- Students taking the course are **not eligible for Youth Allowance.**
- There is a **voucher system** for exams - students must **buy a voucher to sit the exam.**



Basically you pay more so they pay less to train you to make them money ⚡

- Students are expected to get a job by themselves, they are not placed in one by the company.
- The job you have been trained for, **Microsoft Help Desk, pays only \$30,000pa full time, barely scraping the poverty line.**
- Microsoft, or **the company who hires you pays nothing to train you to do their job**, saving them three months wages and the cost of training.
- Students who have taken out a loan to finance the course are called on to **begin repayments within a few weeks of commencing training.**
- Being unable to afford the repayments for your degree will harm your credit rating.**

- the exam paper is **\$610 per exam.**
- The initial ten thousand dollars only covers a **three month course.**
- Students who pay another \$20,000 can have a stab at an MCSE with a bonus Bachelor of Information Technology from the dodgy university.



**CHARLES STURT
UNIVERSITY**

This is clearly an extortion racket. Say NO! to upfront fees. Be ACTIVE in your Students' Council!

A desk, with a lamp, and their own room to study.

Gough Whitlam, on being asked to give an example of his views on equality, replied "I want every kid to have a desk, with a lamp, and his own room to study" (1975)

HOW TO CUT THE WAITING LIST FOR HOUSING- STOP PROVIDING THE SERVICE! Thanks Di.

It is no secret to those who have tried to get access to University Housing, that the student rooms next to Macquarie Centre are no longer for rent. Instead the University is offering places at Macquarie University College at twice the price. This article is not focusing on the fact that students were rorted at the Sydney 2000 Olympics where the University hosted the Canadian Olympic Team, but rather the fact that the old Olympic village which has become the latest College on campus, is a rort on our Union (for reasons I will go into later), and an attack on equity for students. The University Housing located on Herring Road near Macquarie Center is earmarked for bulldozing to make way for expansions to the provision of cheap Research Park facilities to big business, or, it is rumored, a railway station for AMP Macquarie Centre. As of last year, the University is no longer providing affordable, non-collegiate housing on campus, or at least not taking new residents. This means that the rooms for 130 students are not being utilised or maintained, and the waiting list for Housing, (200 in 1987!, the real demand being well double that now) is being abandoned to the rents of North Ryde, Epping and Marsfield which amount to entire Youth Allowance payments. What is clear in all this is that Housing provides opportunity, not just to study, but to break the mould of the economic and class system in Australia. Furthermore, the simultaneously declining standards of housing for the poor and the burgeoning subsidies given to the rich are interconnected, and form a continuing pattern of hypocrisy, irresponsibility and mean-spiritedness from the University.

STUDENTS CAN'T AFFORD TO LIVE IN YERBURY'S POCKETS

In light of this decline the obvious needs to be restated:

- "Income and availability of suitable accommodation affect the ability of young people to satisfy their housing needs. In this respect, students are similar to other people on low incomes or government benefits." Hancock I and Burke T Youth Housing Policy, Swinbourne Institute of Technology, 1982, p. 140, for Australian Housing Research Council.
- Students also have particular needs directly related to their attendance at an educational institution. The financial costs of study (e.g. fees and course materials) add further to the problems encountered on a low income.
- Proximity to the place of study is an important factor in suitability, and the demands of study can impose restrictions on the type of accommodation suitable for students.
- Students do not have access to housing commission / public housing programs.
- Students on Youth Allowance earn 51% of the poverty line and many students earn much less.

WE WON IT THEN, LETS WIN IT NOW

The provision of non-collegiate housing was fought for and won by students in 1973, and is being lost in 2002. Naturally the Education Collective is the forum for rebuilding the fight for this necessity of equity. The houses are in a condition that could be expected of student housing, but are vastly superior to the standard of share housing one can get for \$75 a week in Epping or North Ryde, i.e. *nothing*. Students simply cannot afford to pay \$150 per week to live at Macquarie University College while studying full time. In fact students cannot afford to work at all while studying full time due both to the workload of the degree, and to the impact a neglected GPA will have on future advancement in academic fields. This is why there is an outcry over the cuts to income support for students. Such cuts are designed to exclude from university all but the 'spawn of the bourgeoisie'.

The student housing situation is even more alarming when compared to the accommodation available at the other end of the spectrum, the \$10 million 5 star Travellodge hotel on campus next to the Graduate School of Management and the Vice Chancellor's office. In fact the decline of Housing and the arrival of the Hotel reflect not just on the University's priorities for student accommodation, but on their entire strategy for prioritising some Departments over others, and the *kind of class background* they desire of prospective Macquarie Students.

HOUSING WAS TOO SMALL TEN YEARS AGO AND THE UNIVERSITY DID NOTHING. (see history of student housing)

In 1986, MUSC began to seriously look at the provision of housing on campus. This was in response to a severe housing shortage in Sydney, especially affecting students due to low levels of income support. At the time students earned 74% of the Henderson Poverty Line. Today students earn 51% of the poverty line. In that time, rents in the area have disproportionately increased. Submissions to the University were thorough, and included development proposals and quotes from builders and developers. These proposals were rejected on the grounds that the University had more pressing capital works priorities. **The connection between housing and corporatisation of the campus is that these development proposals were related to the area now given to the research park and a 5 star hotel.**



THEY HAVE THE MONEY, LOOK AROUND, THEY'RE GIVING IT AWAY!

It is clear that the Housing situation also reveals a bigger picture of who is being rewarded and punished. It is sadly uncontroversial that the traditional arts subjects are being punished for their 'recalcitrant' stance on academic freedom, staff unionism, and collegial dissent to Admin since the inception of the University. It is also sadly uncontroversial that the University does not recognise people who come here to study as students, but as EFTSUs. The funds for student housing could easily come from the wages of University Administration! If salaries for the Vice Chancellor and her cronies were reduced to 1991 levels plus inflation, we would have the funds to provide low cost accommodation

that would fill the gap in the accommodation shortfall. The Vice Chancellor and cronies now earn \$730,000 each, and in 1991 this amount was a more modest \$92,000.

THE RESEARCH PARK

The Macquarie Research Park dominates the land on Talavera Rd and Herring Rd adjacent to Macquarie Centre. This land is, in the long term, simply being given to multinationals at a bargain basement price. Corporations come to the Research Park initially on a 21 year lease, after which time the land is handed to them on a 99 year lease. The corporations involved include Dow Corning, Goodman-Fielder, Covance and Siemens. Some people may be interested to note that these companies are not even Australian, and have many dubious connections which you can find out all about at the Environment Collective. The Research Park is located in exactly the same spot as the proposed second stage of students' housing, which was never built.

THE HOTEL

The Graduate School of Management provides its own accommodation and has a **5 star hotel** on campus. This was funded by a commercial loan taken out by the Graduate School of Management, with the assurance from the University that it would continue to provide the School with students who could afford to pay. This means that **money not merit** is the new entry criteria for student admissions to parts of the university.

EDUCATION ELITE OR CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY?

To make themselves feel better about the sell-off of public education, and the criminal diversion of public education funding into their own pockets, Admin have for some time pretended to be executives of a business. Now, to complete the charade, **the new Chancellor, Maurice Newman, is the chairman of the Australian Stock Exchange!** This gives the clearest indication of for whom the university functions.

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

If you are an local first year Macquarie student you have bugger all chance of getting a place at the new college, let alone an affordable one. Macquarie University College is primarily designed to cater for overseas students, most of whom pay up front for their degrees (graduating students are now asked if they want to attend a graduation ceremony in Hong Kong or Singapore). Macquarie University College is being managed by SAM, i.e. Macquarie University Union Limited. This is forcing the Union into a position of working against students just to make a buck off them. By taking on management of the College, the Union will find itself in the difficult position of asking students for their entire income to live on campus, and later of throwing them onto the street when they cannot pay. As the buildings deteriorate from their present shoddy prefab condition (go take a look, it's on the street up from the Gym) maintenance costs will make it even more unlikely that rents will come down. This is a further real estate interest to add to SAM's already surprising and significant investment in surrounding real estate and off-campus restaurant interests.

GET INVOLVED IN THE EDUCATION COLLECTIVE

The time to fight for student housing is now, to save the last remaining affordable accommodation in the North Ryde district! The alternatives are too hideous to contemplate living in - someone's shed, the bush next to the M2, your mate's couch for three years, a tent behind X5B.

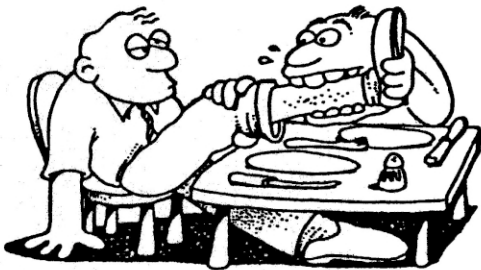
...**HISTORY OF**

It seems history repeats!

*1969 to 1972, a severe accommodation crisis exists in Sydney, especially affecting students due to the current level of scholarships. This situation is worse in suburbs around Macquarie.

*The Students' Council initiate a Student Accommodation campaign for three years which includes a tent city on the front lawn.

*The university finally allows 2 of the 20 cottages on campus to be used by Students' Council for emergency accommodation starting in 1970. However, it charges council commercial rates for these: ranging from \$1677 in 1970 to \$2572 in 1974. The cottages are at 193 and 207 Culloden Rd and are administered on a voluntary basis by Council. Rents are low despite problems with rent collection; any shortfalls being made up with Students Council funds.



*Under the Whitlam Labor government in 1973 the Universities Commission recommends the development of non-collegial style accommodation as this is not only cheaper for students but also cheaper to run than traditional colleges.

*Commonwealth funding is estimated at 50% of building costs or \$2500 per place. The 1973 report recommends that the Macquarie proposal house 100 students.

*In 1974 a Lend Lease Pty Ltd bid is accepted for construction of a 109 bed town house style development. The commonwealth grant is then \$271,000 with the remaining cost of \$378,925 being borrowed from the National Australia bank, repayable over 19 years at a fixed interest rate of 9.5%

*These plans include provision for a second stage of the complex to be built with a further 100 places, probably in the next triennium funding period 1976 to 1978.

*Building is completed in 1975 with students moving in very late in the year. Due to overwhelming demand a waiting list is instituted. This list has 150 people on it by 1976 and the current weighted system of entry is instituted. From then on to the present the waiting list is always in operation with no rooms remaining empty more than a few weeks for changeover of tenants. At this time the two cottages administered by Students Council are incorporated into the administration of the new complex.

*In 1975 the university applies for a further grant to build an additional 100 places in the 1976 to 78 period, but asks for funding on the basis of 75% of

DEPRESSED?

FED UP? UNHAPPY?



**TAKE OUT YOUR
TENSIONS
ON THE REAL ENEMY**

YOU KNOW IT MAKES SENSE...

STUDENT HOUSING

the estimated cost. Subsequently, under the Fraser Coalition government this plus all major works programs at Macquarie, except library extensions, are shelved.

*The university administration decides other capital works have priority over student accommodation and deletes the housing extensions altogether from its funding submissions for the next 3 trienniums 1978 to 81, 1981 to 83 and 1983 to 86. However, during this period it does incorporate 3 more cottages into the Housing System which now has 130 places.

*In 1985 the administration recommends to its housing board that 4 of the cottages be resumed for alternative uses. These include the cottages originally run by Students Council one of which has the only disabled access in the whole system. Also the alternative use suggested for 2 of the cottages is student accommodation provided by Dunmore Lang College. The logic of turning \$28 per week accommodation into \$83 per week is left unexplained. This proposal is defeated at housing board after strong opposition from the students present.

*In 1986 a severe accommodation crisis existed in Sydney, especially affecting students due to low levels of income support. Situation is worse in suburbs around Macquarie. Student income is 75% of the poverty line.

*In 2002 a severe crisis in affordable accommodation exists in Sydney, especially in the suburbs around Macquarie. This especially affects students with Youth Allowance being 51.83% of the poverty line. Students are hit doubly hard compared to other Youth Allowance recipients due to the cost of study, and the draconian welfare policy of the current Coalition government, where students are paying back HECS while still earning below poverty line incomes, and students under 25 are not classified as independent from their parents income which starts to exclude them from income support at levels below poverty.

*The waiting list has always excluded first year students from non-collegial student housing at Macquarie. This is totally inadequate as for many disadvantaged students, the first year experience shapes whether they continue with their education. Charging a student their entire income for rent is not a solution, but merely demonstrates the contempt this university has for undergraduates.

*Cheap, accessible accommodation is still urgently required at Macquarie. Get involved in the defence of Student Housing!

Work cuts into class time

A REPORT by the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee has shown that more than a third of university students are missing classes because of their work commitments.

Australia's Tertiary Education Union national president Carolyn Allport said: "University staff regularly report that the ability of students to devote themselves to their studies is being compromised by the need to work longer hours to support themselves.

"We must do something about student poverty to protect both the quality and accessibility of higher education."

See the Tenants' Union at www.tenants.org.au or pick up the Share Housing Survival Guide from the MUSC front office.

This year Howard plans to spend \$11.6 billion on the military. The military will be receiving at least a \$2 billion increase, whilst every other government department can expect more funding cuts. Our universities, tafes, hospitals, community services, public transport systems, childcare centres and public housing [the list is nearly endless] are in crisis due to being under funded and under-resourced. Considering the crisis situation we find our public services in, these further cuts seem ludicrous. The

From the National Education Officer

they will have no problems in continuing and increasing their agenda of privatisation, racism and militarism. How waging a war on the second poorest country in the world was going to rid the world of terrorism has yet to be revealed. Instead what has been guaranteed is that a further 7.5 million people will now be starving. That billions of dollars have been spent on the arms industry. That thousands of land mines have been laid in areas where children regularly walk. That at least 1 million people have had to leave their homes in search of a house not yet bombed by the "International Coalition against Terror". Given the emphasis on 'defence' in the Liberal's budget and the seeming indifference to civilian casualties, media reports and government statements should be looked at with a critical eye. This is not just goodies versus baddies. The racist policies of mandatory detention of asylum seekers and the 'Pacific Solution' have received widespread condemnation. Despite this the government seems hell bent on continuing to deny people their basic human rights. What does this say about the priorities of the Howard Government? A boost to the 'defence' budget means more money to intimidate and harass people locked up in detention centres and more money so people can drown off the shores of Australia whilst simply trying to escape violence, poverty and war. This is in stark contrast to the \$4.4 billion earmarked for higher education in the same period. Since the Howard Government was elected in 1996 they have slashed over \$1 billion from government funding to higher education. As a result of these sustained attacks higher education is now in crisis. We face massive funding cuts every budget round, up-front fees and unfair inadequate income support. This has meant that the reality of life for many students is one of debt, poverty and a declining quality of education. Increasingly we are expected to pay for our education. To do this we work part-time jobs that pay "youth-wages" [read: slave wages] and now we have the GST that taxes those who can least afford it. Our campus conditions are deteriorating beyond belief. We sit in overcrowded lectures, are taught by stressed out and over-worked staff, tutorials are near extinct if they exist at all and heaps of our education is taught to us on-line. At the same time the decrease in government funding and deregulation of education has left the door wide open for multinationals corporations to walk straight in and start gaining control of our education. Our classes in environmental science, engineering or economics are taught by BHP or Westpac, whilst classes in indigenous studies and art history

Howard government's re-election on such a right-wing reactionary platform means that

Every time university operating grants are slashed at a federal level, teaching and learning budgets are cut, staff are sacked or their rights as workers attacked and every time you are expected to pay more for your education we take another step further away from the belief that education is a right and a step closer to the concept of education as a privilege.

are disappearing fast. Corporations are more than eager to involve themselves in the "business" of education. They are doing this by filling the void left by a lack of government funding, providing resources and funds to educational institutions. In return they are awarded decision making spots on University Councils and a big say in the university curriculum [read: what we are taught]. Some of the major corporate players in higher education are BHP, Boral, McDonalds, ICI, Rio Tinto, Shell and the Australian Defence Dept. Over the last few years, academics have reported the impact that corporate "sponsors" have had on research: the right to withhold research findings that cast their products in a bad light, for example. Restructuring has also meant that university courses have been effectively 'dumbed down'. This is not a result of larger enrolments, as some academics have charged, but the intensification of work: classes that were previously year long now go for a semester or even a term. The mantra of "Put up, shut up, then get out" is being chanted by managers eagerly implementing the corporatisation of the university. Corporate desire for skilled workers means that universities and the government are under pressure to have a high turn over of students to fill this demand. This explains the push to tri-semesters and fee paying short graduate diplomas. It should be

pointed out that these policies have their origin in the business sector. In 1999 Melbourne University Private [the corporate branch of Melbourne University] had a contract with the Australian Defence College to conduct a course called "Strategic Studies", This course had three Indonesian

military personnel enrolled. Clearly in the context of the Indonesian military's twenty-four year reign of terror and genocide in East Timor, and their suppression of democracy in Indonesia, these links, out of which Melbourne Uni Private makes huge profits are completely unacceptable. Disturbingly with the growth of corporate influence in education by companies that also have a profit interest in war we are witnessing an increase in military presence on our campuses. From army recruitment stalls in oweek and research into weapons of war taking place in our labs to scholarships being handed out to student by companies involved in the nuclear weapons and arms industry, the military certainly

is making its presence felt. Students have historically been at the forefront of anti-military and anti-war movements around the world. It is time for student to again take a stand against our governments involvement in warfare and our universities turning into killing machines. The corporatisation of our education is a direct attack on democracy. Through corporate intervention and control into our education we learn to view everything the way big business would like us to. It is not because big businesses are good corporate citizens that they deal out money to educational institutions. It is a carefully planned move to subscribe people to the views that will ensure the status quo is maintained – an accepting workforce and an apathetic consuming population. The more dependant a university is on corporate funds, the less likely it will teach students to question the means and motivations of corporations. Students aren't learning how to be critical thinkers or citizens but instead consumers and uncritical cogs in the machine. Education in Australia is increasingly based on a concept of user-pays – a concept that relies on a belief that it is solely the individual that benefits from education, and thus it is the individual that should bear the cost of that education. This is the Howard

government's rationale for slashing funding to higher education. In the last six year the amount that students contribute to the cost of education has doubled to nearly 40%. In practice, placing the burden of cost on the individual means that only the already wealthy in our society can access education. Only the privileged become lawyer or doctors, while the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed remain so. The ideology of user-pays completely fails to recognise the fact that education benefits all people, not just the recipients; therefore the cost should be borne by the whole of society. Where would we be without teachers or nurses? How would society function without engineers or scientists? Fully publicly funded education could very easily and should be achieved through a system of progressive taxation [read: increasing corporate taxes] and a decrease on military spending. A fully publicly funded

system of education allows for all people to gain access, not just those from an already privileged position in our society. So, potentially public education could break down traditional gender and class barriers and provide the building blocks for a more just and equitable society. It is important for those of us who are organising to fight for progressive change to ensure that we do so in such a way that reflects the type of society that we hope to achieve. For the rich and powerful minority it is possible to look after their own interests and be individualistic but for those of us who don't benefit from the status quo and want to create change, we must join together and organise collectively to ensure that the interests of the many are put before the interests of the privileged few. Unions are organizational structures that exist to facilitate collective organising and struggle. They bring together groups in society such as workers or students. Although the unions that we see today are far from perfect, they demonstrate from time to time the strength that exists in collective

organisation and struggle. For collective organising to be effective it must be truly democratic. Decisions must be made democratically with input from all who want to contribute, rather than decisions being handed down from an elite few as we see in society at present. When it is time to put the decisions made into action it is important that the action is also collective. Individualistic actions such as letter writing or lobbying are easily ignored by the powers that be and are of little significance to the rest of the population. On the other hand, taking collective action with thousands of people, whether it be a march in the streets or the smashing down of the doors to parliament house, cannot be dismissed and it cannot be ignored. Collective organising and action is not just the most politically sound way to create change, it is the only way. The National Union of Students [NUS] is a national student organisation, it's made



up of campus student organisations from universities across Australia. Student organisations choose to affiliate to NUS through campus referendums in which all students can vote. Over 600,000 students are members of NUS [that means you]. Students are able to participate in NUS at both a state and national level by being involved in campaigns and by running as candidates and voting for NUS delegates in campus elections, which take place every year. The National Union of Students is active around a wide range of issues – education issues, anti-racism, women's liberation, indigenous rights, anti-homophobia, environmental sustainability and student unionism.... all students have the opportunity to get involved in these campaigns at a campus, cross campus or national level. We believe that campaigns are a vital part of involving more students in our national union. It's our union and so it is up to each one of us to get involved in making it an active, democratic fighting union. It is only through collective organising and action that we can ever hope to achieve real and meaningful change. Your NUS Education Department contacts for 2002 are: NUS National Education Officer: Camille Barbagallo p: 03 9650 8908 m: 0413 041 083 e: education@nus.asn.au The State Education Officers are: NUS NSW Monika Wheeler - 0407 674 313 Anna York - 0402 025 703

15 YEARS OF GOVERNMENT ATTACKS UPON HIGHER EDUCATION: A CHRONOLOGY

1987 - HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION CHARGE

The Higher Education Administration charge was an upfront payment of \$250. Students organised a highly successful mass boycott campaign of the unpopular fee, which was later to be replaced by HECS, where students were trapped into paying later through the tax system.

1989 - HIGHER EDUCATION CONTRIBUTIONS SCHEME

The first fundamental shift towards user-pays ideology in the higher education sector. By claiming that HECS payments would be reinvested into the Federal education budget, the Hawke government was able to make individuals responsible for the cost of their education, previously provided free as a responsibility by the State, and a right to all. The wage rate at which HECS would start to be repaid was set at average weekly earnings (\$28,000 p.a.).

1992 - AUSTUDY LOANS SCHEME

The Keating government attempted to turn Austudy, the forerunner to Youth Allowance, into a commercial loan. By giving away part of their allowance, students would receive double their entitlements as a commercial loan, but would have to pay it back within 5 years of taking the loan, or whenever they received average weekly earnings - effectively 100% interest! Students demonstrations against the proposed replacement of Austudy with a loans scheme meant that loans did not replace grants but are available in addition to the grant component.

1994 - UPFRONT FEES FOR POSTGRADUATE DEGREES

By introducing upfront fees for postgraduate degrees in 1994, the Labor government paved the way for the future introduction of full upfront fees for undergraduate students, and the eventual deregulation of Higher Education. Students at the Australian National University staged a dramatic occupation of their administration office, which forced a backdown from their administration over upfront postgrad fees.

1996 - HOWARD'S RAZOR GANG ELECTED.

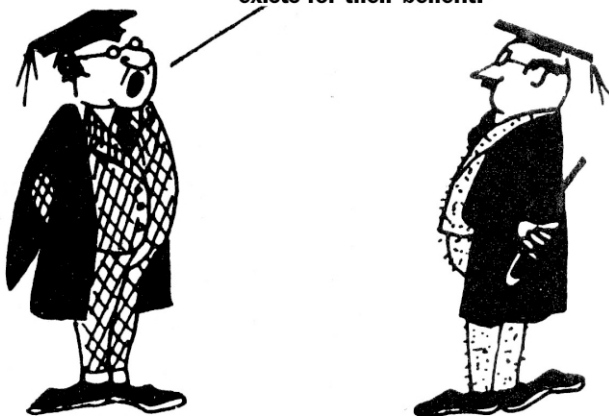
Immediate 6% funding cut to universities.

The government slashed almost \$800 million from Higher Education in its 1996 budget. Using the excuse of a "budget black hole", university budgets were slashed 6%, causing massive overcrowding and the widespread cancelling of courses, amalgamation or closure of many departments, and overworking, retrenchment and sacking of many university staff, including academics. Government funding makes up only about 50% of most universities' budget funds, as they rely heavily on the corporate sector to the money to pay for Higher Education. Corporations like Rio Tinto, Shell, BHP and Microsoft are able to have a say on the content of courses, *cough* COMP 103 *cough*, and non-profit making areas which cannot easily attract corporate sponsorship, like Humanities, have been left to deal with the massive funding shortfall and have been decimated at many campuses. Obviously courses which can garner more revenue for the university, by attracting fee-paying students, such as Business, Law and even Science, have suffered less.

UPFRONT FEES FOR UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

Having cushioned the blow by first introducing upfront fees for overseas students and postgraduates, the Liberals allowed 25% of undergraduate student places to be filled by fee-paying students, rather than publicly funded places. Wealth and privilege, already determinants of people's ability to enter University education, became legitimated as acceptable criteria for admission. 8 universities across Australia introduced upfront fees. In early 1997, a wave of student unrest and campus occupations aimed to protest at the incoming changes. At RMIT university in Melbourne, a 19 day occupation of the Finance and Strategic Management building forced the university into a student/staff referendum on whether to introduce fees, which they overwhelmingly lost. At UTS, a peaceful 3 day occupation of the Administration building, broken up by police with dogs and sledgehammers, succeeded in defeating the plans of the Vice Chancellor Tony Blake to introduce fees.

Some of the students seem to think this place exists for their benefit.



HECS INCREASED, THRESHOLD LOWERED:

Under education minister Vanstone, HECS was increased between 35% and 125%. What's more, differential HECS was introduced. Whereas previously students paid a flat rate per year (calculated at 4% of course costs) for their degree, as of 1996 Humanities, Arts, Nursing, Social Sciences and Visual Arts courses charged \$3,300 per year; Science, Business, Maths, Computer Science, Agriculture, Architecture, Health Science and Engineering went up to \$4,700 per year, whilst Law, Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science paid a whopping \$5,500.

What's more, the income threshold at which students had to start repaying their HECS was lowered from \$28,000 (average weekly earnings) to \$20,701. This in addition to **the abolishment of the guarantee that HECS revenue would be directly reinvested in the Higher Education budget**, which was the rationale used to sell the introduction of HECS in the first place!

INCREASE IN AGE OF INDEPENDENCE:

As part of the package, the Liberals increased the Age of Independence, whereby students qualify to receive income support while full time students at 25 years of age, as opposed to 22! This was an ageist, homophobic and sexist measure, because it assumed that parents are willing to support the educational aspirations of their children until their mid-20s. Ignoring the fact that this would have forced adults into repressive home-environments where they could be subjected to violence or harassment if they were gay, or anything else their parents do not approve of.

ABSTUDY AND CHILDCARE SLASHED:

\$349 million dollars was cut from children's services when the Howard government was elected. This has led to huge increases in fees, and the closure and downsizing of many childcare centres. Abstudy was likewise "aligned" with Youth Allowance payments, resulting in Indigenous students losing on average \$50 a fortnight. Indigenous people and single parents already face some of the most serious barriers to accessing a university education. At the same time, the government scapegoats "welfare cheats" and "job snobs", and allows bigotry and racist sentiment to build, because it makes its agenda easier to push.

1994/2002- VOLUNTARY STUDENT UNIONISM

Victoria and Western Australia still live under VSU, introduced there by reactionary state Liberal governments in 1994. In WA, this has meant the near-collapse of many student organisations, some sustaining memberships of only 10%, thus unable to provide essential services like women's departments, research, legal advice, student loans, and fund campaigns and struggles for free education. In Victoria, the VSU legislation is even more evil, because it actually regulates what the student organisation can spend money on, outlawing so-called "political" activities, like student newspapers. "Political" activity, if it implies criticism of the actions of our rulers, when censored and curtailed, has an unnerving tone of fascism that in Australia is becoming increasingly commonplace under John Howard.

1999 saw the Liberal government's ultimate attempt to silence all criticism to its slash-and-burn agenda of economic rationalism. In a leaked cabinet briefing, David Kemp was quoted as backing VSU because he saw it as imperative to vanish the experience of unionism from the lives of students. Since Unions represent the basic notion of people organising to achieve better conditions, the Liberals hate unions in general, because they stand in the way of unhindered profit for the rich. Following in the footsteps of the failed attempt to crush the Maritime Union of Australia on the wharves, the government and Liberal students tried to destroy NUS. They couched the arguments in terms of freedom of choice, but their thin rhetoric could not mask the historical fact- that student unions have always fought against the regressive policies of Liberal and Labor governments, and have been some of the most militant campaigners against economic rationalism within society. VSU legislation was an attempt to silence political dissent on the campuses, to enable the Liberal government to continue on the mission to turn education into a profit making, graduate-factory industry unhindered.

1999: THE GREEN PAPER: VOUCHERS AND "STUDENT CENTERED FUNDING"

In October 1999, a leaked paper from the Education ministry detailed a proposal from Kemp's office to further deregulate the sector. The leaked paper included proposals to further reform Higher Education towards a more **market demand driven, highly deregulated system**. The proposal included the abolition of HECS, allowing Universities to charge whatever level and quantity of upfront fees they want, thereby forcing students into lifetimes of debt. Kemp's vision also aimed to force staff into repressive agreements in an attempt to lower wages and conditions, by scrutinising "quality" despite huge funding cuts. **Mass rallies and a public outcry forced the government to back down** from the proposals and distance themselves from Kemp. Whilst the government backed down on most proposals they did not back down on their intention to undermine the tertiary sector unions and did not alter their position on wanting to introduce a form of voucher for postgraduate students as detailed in the Green Paper on Research.

The attacks upon higher education over the last 15 years have seen our higher education system decimated. Education cuts have mirrored broader attacks upon indigenous people, migrants, unions, public health, childcare, unemployment assistance. In short, anything that challenges the rule of profit. More than ever, we need to **fight**. Organise, plot, rebel, revolt and demand the **fully publicly funded, accessible and free education** that you know we all deserve. Contact the Education Collective, and take charge!