



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**HIGHER EDUCATION  
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT  
(2005 MEASURES NO. 4) BILL 2005**

**EDUCATION SERVICES FOR OVERSEAS  
STUDENTS AMENDMENT BILL 2005**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 12 October 2005**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> Ciobo, Steven, MP	<b>Question No.</b>

**Mr CIOBO** (Moncrieff) (6.28 pm)—I am pleased to rise to put in my contribution on this debate on the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (2005 Measures No. 4) Bill 2005, which is part of a cognate debate with the Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment Bill 2005. The bill before the House is important because it helps to establish the Carnegie Mellon University's first overseas branch in Australia—in Adelaide. I am certain that that university will go on to prosper, to get a good foothold here in Australia and to go from strength to strength.

In making these remarks, I would like to turn my attention to the subject matter of much of the debate in the chamber this afternoon and this evening: voluntary student unionism. There are of course provisions in this legislation that talk about the funding of services from overseas students and the ability for that to be funded by the compulsory levying of a fee. But I know that the opposition have focused on and used this as a justification for their outdated and antiquated way of thinking about the way in which students should be forced to pay for services.

It was interesting to hear the member for Banks, who spoke immediately before me, when he said that it was so unfair and so unethical for members on this side of the House to 'remove the dream'—to use his words—of receiving an education. I turn to this point in particular because it is an important issue. Nobody on this side of the chamber has any interest whatsoever in denying young Australians, or indeed Australians of any age, a tertiary education. No-one on this side of the chamber would begrudge any Australian seeking to obtain a tertiary education. Indeed, this government's policies have done more to facilitate young Australians and ordinary Australians undertaking additional tertiary education than those of any other government previously. The Howard government, with the stewardship of the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, have delivered in spades for those students who would like to undertake tertiary education.

But the fundamental issue of whether or not Australians should be forced to join a union is central to the discussion that we are having in the chamber this evening. Fundamentally, the proposition that is advanced by those opposite, that the Australian Labor Party puts forward, is that it is part of the price of undertaking a tertiary degree—that if someone is going to university then they should expect to have to pay student union fees in the same way that members of the community are required to pay tax. But I have this question: is there some strange division between those students who are studying at university and the reasons why, it would appear, they are unable to utilise the very services that we all pay taxes for?

When my monthly pay packet comes in and a good proportion goes out in tax, I would have thought that the taxes that I am paying—and that the minister at the table, Minister Hockey, and indeed all working Australians pay—go towards providing the kinds of services that students would draw upon. Certainly we provide outside school hours care. We provide child care. We provide medical care. We provide a whole range of different facilities and services, ranging from the security of our nation right through to Austudy payments which go to students themselves. These are all part of the tapestry of government services that are provided to all Australians, including those who are undertaking tertiary degrees.

Why, then, this special exemption that says, 'In addition to that, those who study at university must pay an additional burden of taxation'? Let us call it taxation, because that is effectively what the Australian Labor Party is claiming that it is. Why must tertiary students pay this additional levy for services? If they can already utilise the services that other members of the public are utilising, why this special range of services for university students? I have not heard one member opposite advance a cogent argument as to why university services need to be singled out as some special species within our society, an argument that says, 'You're entitled to over and above what others in the community can get, so we're going to make sure that you have these particular services available to you from university campuses.' That is the argument that those opposite put forward.

But let us dig a little deeper as to the reason, perhaps, why the Australian Labor Party are wrong on this—because they are very definitely wrong on this issue. The reality is that there are a lot of ordinary, hardworking

Australians out there who do not have the privilege of going to university—and it is a privilege to get a tertiary education. That vast majority of Australians who do not have that privilege are denied the opportunity to have special access to services that you want to keep in place for university students. This is not about saying to university students that they cannot have them. That is not the debate. The debate is: why should they have them with no choice involved?

Surely university students know whether they are getting value for money. If these services that are put forward are as great as the Australian Labor Party likes to make out that they are, then why will students not join voluntarily? If student services are so heavily utilised by the student population and so much required, then why are they not utilised in a voluntary capacity? Why is it that I and all members of the Australian public apparently have the intellectual capacity to determine what services we seek to use, yet university students do not? An arrogant Australian Labor Party says: 'No, you don't know whether or not you're going to utilise those services, so we're going to make you pay for those services.'

Let us look at what some of these services are. Some of them are good; I do not deny that. There is the gift of having childminding services available in your workplace, so to speak, which is what students are receiving when they get child care on campus. I am sure that there are many ordinary Australians who would like to have access to child care that is subsidised by others who do not use the service. I bet they would love to have access to child-care services in every workplace in this country, but it is not provided to them, because it is simply unjustifiable.

Some of the services are good, but then of course there is a whole range of services that student unions provide that quite frankly cannot be justified. Take food outlets, for example. There was a complaint from a University of Queensland student, who stated:

... my purchases at the Union-owned refectories are approximately 20% more expensive than if I walk 10 minutes down the street to the nearest supermarket. The same applies to other Union-owned enterprises. Not only is the Union uncompetitive, but it actively seeks to stifle competition. In fact, the Union has regulations in place which forbid non-Union-owned enterprises from operating on Union premises, if they are in direct competition with a Union-owned enterprise ...

Take buildings for example. The student union of the University of Melbourne is the case in point. It is currently under liquidation after a \$44 million property deal went sour. Should our young students be involved in deals such as this \$44 million property deal at Melbourne university that went into liquidation, or should university administration be responsible for these kinds of services? I have seen examples in the past of these great buildings that student unions are forced to provide because apparently, according to the member for Oxley, there is not enough funding flowing to universities. These are the kinds of consequences that we see when ill-prepared and ill-considered investments are made with money that, quite frankly, is easy come, easy go.

I turn now to sporting facilities. Our universities have produced a great number of sporting stars over the years, and I hope this will continue for a long period. A quick look at where our student compulsory union fees are spent shows that only a very small portion of the budget is spent on sport, yet this continues to be one of the great anchors that the Australian Labor Party makes reference to. Of its approximately \$7 million annual budget, the Melbourne university spends \$3 million on administration and a paltry \$100,000 on sporting clubs and facilities, yet this is one of the most fundamental tenets that the Australian Labor Party puts forward as to why unionism must remain compulsory for students. In my own electorate, I note that the cost of joining a sporting club at the Griffith University's Gold Coast campus is basically the same as the cost of joining a similar non-university club. So where is the great subsidisation of the costs of providing this infrastructure if students are having to pay these fees?

I have looked at a number of articles that make some very interesting comments with respect to, perhaps, some of the reasons why the Australian Labor Party is so keen to defend compulsory student unionism. They are not confined to the fact that the Australian Labor Party actually believes that tertiary students have a right and, indeed, a special privilege to access services that so many others in the community would like to have easy access to. I think they have more to do with the fact that, in typical form, the Australian Labor Party harks back to looking after their union mates.

In every instance, we have seen the Australian Labor Party go in to bat for the union movement. Every Australian Labor Party frontbencher and just about every Australian Labor Party backbencher owe their places in this parliament to their union puppeteers. That is the reason why the Australian Labor Party is so fundamentally opposed to any moves to non-compulsory student unionism. It is not because it fears there will be a decline in services—and if there were a decline in services it would be because students did not want to utilise those

services; its fear comes from the fact that students' money will no longer flow like rivers of gold into the coffers of the Australian Labor Party. On 17 March 2004 there was a very interesting article in the *Australian*, talking about the President of the National Union of Students. It said:

In the aftermath of the Nelson reforms, the NUS is firmly on the warpath and—despite an increased Liberal presence on the national executive—has authorised a \$150,000 campaign in marginal seats during the election.

The campaign, which Jansen says is “the last stand” for higher education in Australia, will include radio and television advertisements, billboards and letterbox drops in six or seven marginal seats across the country.

Jodie Jansen said:

If the Howard Government gets in for another three years our public education system will be unrecognisable.

Perhaps that is one of the motivations for the Australian Labor Party to be so dearly tied to ensuring a continuation of compulsory student unionism. Perhaps it is because there is \$150,000, more money than is spent on sports facilities at Melbourne university, being pumped into marginal seat campaigns to directly benefit those members opposite. I suggest that this could provide some good incentive for the Australian Labor Party. Five or six marginal seats could have been the difference between being in government or being in opposition. Student unions are good union allies for the Australian Labor Party to have. An article by Chris Griffith in the *Courier-Mail* of 23 October 2000 said:

It—

being student unions—

remains the training ground for our future politicians, ministerial advisers, public servants and political operatives—and what a training ground it is. Take Griffith University, the political kindergarten of several young ALP guns who became heavyweights in Labor's AWU faction and are now before the inquiry.

The inquiry he is referring to was the Shepherdson inquiry that was taking place in Queensland. The article went on:

First, the Young Labor Club at Griffith was the scene of violence, and at one stage disbanded, and it is alleged students made themselves available to stack key meetings of other campus organisations. There were some claims of the misuse of student resources for political purposes, such as the repeated unauthorised use of a bus for campaigning for the ALP near Currumbin—

which was a marginal state Labor seat at that stage. The article continued:

There was also a case of the improper use of university resources and letterheads in a push polling operation mounted from the university to oust non-AWU faction office bearers from a furniture union. But there also were serious claims of misappropriation, one of which led to the sacking of the student council's permanent administrator who brought the allegation to the CJC's attention.

So we see right there another reason why the Australian Labor Party is so keen to look after its union mates who are there because of the compulsory nature of student unionism. It has to do with the backroom deals that keep members opposite in their seats in this parliament.

We see the money flowing from student unionism to the Australian Labor Party, we see the money that flows from student unions into maintaining key political campaigns against this government in marginal seats and, in addition to the money, we now see the way in which student unionism is used as part of the backroom deals that the Australian Labor Party makes to keep members here in this chamber. That is all part of the great tapestry that really underscores the reason why the Australian Labor Party is opposed to the disbanding of the compulsory nature of student unionism.

But there is much more about student unions that I would like to share with you. On 17 December 2003, the *Australian* had this to say:

By December 2002, Ray—

for the edification of the chamber, one of the student activists at Melbourne university—

was used to getting his way. His faction had mastered the art of winning student votes by handing out food vouchers to those who cast ballots. Its questionable tactics marginalising his opponents were challenged many times, although not with any success.

The student union, with more than 100 staff, a fleet of cars and access to abundant office equipment and secretarial support, was a solid base from which to advance his interests as a budding young member of the Labor Right.

Once again, not only do we see money flowing to the Australian Labor Party from student unions, and not only do we see factional hacks flowing to the Australian Labor Party to engineer outcomes from student unions, but we also see student union property being used in a way that is not in the interests of students and is not in the interests of those who are working hard so that they can go to university. Quite frankly, it is in the interests of the political apparatchiks who are members of the Australian Labor Party, affiliated with the NUS, affiliated with the Australian Labor Party, and that is the reason why the Australian Labor Party is so keen to defend them.

Voluntary student unionism comes down to one simple issue: whether or not Australians who are studying at university have the right to make a decision about where their \$200, \$300 or \$400 goes, which, currently, they are compelled to pay to the student union.

**Ms George**—They can opt out of paying.

**Mr CIOBO**—They cannot opt out of paying, because the way it is all dealt with is that, if a student decides not to pay the compulsory union fee, they pay even more. That goes to the university administration and, in turn, flows indirectly back to the student union. What we actually see is that there is not really any way at all that a student does not have to pay the student union fee. Fundamentally, there is only one simple question in all of this: do Australians have enough brains to make decisions about whether they get value for their dollar when they go to university? If the answer to that question is yes, there is no need to force them to pay. If the answer to the question of whether or not students get value is yes, students will join student unions voluntarily in the same way they use other commercial operators and in the same way they use other services throughout the community. But if the answer to these questions is no, that is the reason why the Australian Labor Party says, ‘We must continue to compel students to join student unions.’

The bills before the House tonight are straightforward bills dealing with Carnegie Mellon. But the fundamental question of student unionism is one that goes to the core of the kind of society we want. It is the kind of society that says to people, ‘Even though you’re not a university student, we believe that the taxes you pay should provide certain services—services which also flow to students.’ I cannot look in the eye a member of my community—one who works hard, maybe even does double shifts, has a young family to support and would dearly love to have other people subsidising services they desperately need in their workplace—and say to them that university students deserve special recognition and special university services. I cannot, in sincerity, say that to those people. What I can say is that the real issue as to why the Labor Party is behind compulsory unionism is so much deeper than what they say. *(Time expired)*