FAUSA and the rise and fall of the binary system of higher education in Australia

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Abstract

This paper examines the position(s) of the former Federation of Australian University Student Associations (FAUSA), a national organisation which represented academics in universities in Australia. In relation to the rise and roll of the binary system of higher education in Australia. The binary system, which divided higher education into universities and colleges of advanced education (CAE's), was an important sentiment designed to address the tensions implicit in reconciling the divergent purposes of higher education from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s. It is argued that FAUSA's position on these specific examples of change and continuity in the pursuit of "dual closures" (Parker, 1979) "dual closures" was a mode of social formation in which power is directed both upwards and downwards and is typically pursued by organisations of the "service class". From the beginning these were two contradictory impulses in FAUSA's response to the binary system, one which sought to undermine its distinctions and one which sought to reinforce them. Nevertheless, the former was stronger on an essentially classical basis than a series of skirmishes between those who pursued an emancipatory agenda and those who pursued an elitist one. The defence of the elite status of universities, for example, was as much a response to interventions and assaults from above (e.g., funding cuts, new government structures) as a reaction to the interests of the students from below. Similarly, calls for greater access to higher education and a broader conception of the role of the university were largely a reaction to the divisive policies of the binary system. It was not until the early 1980s that these two contradictory impulses were reconciled on the basis of an essentially classical view of the role of higher education and its potential to contribute to the development of a society of citizens.

Introduction

The significance of the post-war expansion of higher education in Australia and its impact on the welfare and social position of the society at large has been accompanied by controversy over its nature and role. Issues of "quality", "diversity", and "accessibility" have been at the centre of the ongoing debate. An important sentiment designed to address the tensions implicit in reconciling the divergent purposes of higher education from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s. It is argued that FAUSA's position on these specific examples of change and continuity in the pursuit of "dual closures" (Parker, 1979) "dual closures" was a mode of social formation in which power is directed both upwards and downwards and is typically pursued by organisations of the "service class". From the beginning these were two contradictory impulses in FAUSA's response to the binary system, one which sought to undermine its distinctions and one which sought to reinforce them. Nevertheless, the former was stronger on an essentially classical basis than a series of skirmishes between those who pursued an emancipatory agenda and those who pursued an elitist one. The defence of the elite status of universities, for example, was as much a response to interventions and assaults from above (e.g., funding cuts, new government structures) as a reaction to the interests of the students from below. Similarly, calls for greater access to higher education and a broader conception of the role of the university were largely a reaction to the divisive policies of the binary system. It was not until the early 1980s that these two contradictory impulses were reconciled on the basis of an essentially classical view of the role of higher education and its potential to contribute to the development of a society of citizens.

Universities have been characterised as the "treasure-house" or "cultural hearth" of society. This is a view that is shared by many, especially those who have been educated within the academic tradition. However, it is also a view that has been challenged by those who see universities as serving a primarily economic function. This challenge has taken many forms, including the emphasis on the social function of universities and the role of the academic community in society.

Academics, class and class position

Unions have been considered to be the key to the effective organisation of academics. This view is supported by the findings of the survey that was conducted as part of this research. The survey showed that there is a strong correlation between the number of academics who belong to a union and their class position. The survey also showed that there is a significant difference in the way that academics perceive their class position, depending on whether they are members of a union or not. The survey results suggest that there is a need for further research into the role of academics in society and the impact that unionisation has on their class position.

The binary system

The binary system of higher education in Australia is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. It has been subject to a great deal of debate and discussion in recent years. However, it is clear that the binary system has had a significant impact on the quality of higher education in Australia. The binary system has been characterized as a "dual" system, with two distinct levels of education: the "university" level and the "technical" level. The "university" level is characterized by a focus on research and the production of knowledge, while the "technical" level is characterized by a focus on the provision of skills and training.

The binary system has been criticized for its emphasis on the production of knowledge, which is seen as a means of maintaining the status quo, rather than as a way of promoting social change. This is because the binary system is seen as perpetuating social inequality, as it provides access to higher education only for a select group of students.

The binary system has also been criticized for its emphasis on the production of skills and training, which is seen as a means of maintaining the status quo, rather than as a way of promoting economic growth. This is because the binary system is seen as perpetuating economic inequality, as it provides access to high-paying jobs only for a select group of students.

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Short did not believe that these statements provided a rationale for the binary system. In his view they failed to acknowledge the profound difficulties faced by CAEs in having their work equally valued with that of other institutions. He pointed to the lack of flexibility and the differences between universities and CAEs by identifying the strengths of both traditions identified by Burgess and True:

No one is suggesting that the preservation of essentially different types of institution validates the persistence of innumerable other qualifications and functions traditionally associated with universities. Some institutions areinnecessary; others are clearly desirable. The important point is that only some should be engaged in what is essentially the same enterprise.

A shorter, unattributed draft (FAUSA, 1973) was tabled in response to Short’s report at the FAUSA Annual General Meeting (AGM) in the following year. It was an interesting document, significantly agreeing with and condensing Short on its conclusions. It urged further study of the matter and recommended that a committee be formed for this purpose.

By 1977 FAUSA had come to regard the question diametrically opposed to that of Short’s, concentrating on the introduction of Education and Training (Williams, 1976) it asserted that: there is an inextricable difference between universities and other institutions in terms of their general educational goals, their standards and their ethos.

This was elaborated on this with a follow-up paper considered at the FAUSA Annual General Meeting in 1978 (FAUSA, 1978). This paper described itself in the following terms:

The document differs from... previous documents by emphasizing distinguishing characteristics in an assertive manner, and in not attempting to emphasize references to quotations and statements of institutions as being reflexively equivalent. However, the main thrust of that, this view was not shared by FAUSA and the issue became a source of tension between FAUSA and the FSACA coming to a head at the Academic Studies Tribunal in 1976 when, in line with the position adopted by FAUSA, the issue in salaried teachers was abandoned.

Defining the differences

In the early 1970s Short wrote to State and Federal Ministers for Education asking them to define the differences between CAEs and universities in the policy implications of these differences. Professor L.N. Short made his report as an invited paper for the Education Commission’s annual general meeting in 1972. Short began his paper by observing that the binary system in Australia, paralelled the binary system of higher education in England, which included the famous ‘Preston’ document on the virtues of parentheses tradition: the university tradition; academic and exclusive concern with the preservation, extension and dissemination of knowledge for its own sake and the training of a small number of students concerned with the development of vocational and professional education, and emphasizing teaching rather than research.

Short then went on to detail these differences, as well as statements about the binary system from other sources, including the Martin Report. He described a general pattern ("widely held beliefs", cited ibid in p. 9) in which CAEs were seen as "rough and ready" institutions but watered down so that the difference between the institutions was put on a par with universities. The trend of institutional biherrachical structuring of knowledge was plainly evident but unacknowledged in the statements, which emphasised the concept of equal but different education funding and reductions of academic conditions (though academics were, for example, earning less). Though, through their ignorance or lack of control or even lack of information in the rhetoric of the document, it can be considered an attempt to articulate a strategy of dual closure.

The document differed from universities in that the universities were considered to be superior to CAEs, the latter of which were often seen as "commodities samo... './../../

The 1979 paper drew a response from the Macquarie University Senate and the FSACA. The Macquarie responses made the point rejecting elitism and divisive approaches to higher education. The FSACA argued that, while their document emphasized the importance of CAEs, their purpose was to highlight the importance of CAEs, not to "demonstrate the superiority of the one set of institutions over the other in any general sense."

Even when presented in these terms, however, such a proposal was unacceptable to a significant number of FAUSA’s members. The University of Sydney, for example, passed a motion that the national framework of a dual system was "not acceptable to the University of Sydney" and "in general it is the belief of University of Sydney that one form or another of university education naturally occupies a substantial portion of the total educational assets of the Federation and its constituent members. FAUSA should not hesitate to take on the role of a small, specialized association representing the interests of a sector with significantly different characteristics, aims, and purposes which are recognized by the world community as being unique."

In 1984 HERT produced a booklet entitled The Tertiary Education Research Conference 1984: Background, Findings, Approach in this document is not consistent with the self-promotional claims made by FAUSA, nor with the earlier submission to the Martin Committee (FCUSA, 1962). As has been noted above, while the Martin Committee articulated a broad conception of higher education, it was conspicuous in its silence on social issues. The 1984 report, on the other hand, conluded a report on a report on the question of "what can be done to encourage CAEs to become more elitist, more professional, and more consistent with the needs of disadvantaged groups" (HERT, 1984, p. 4). Like the Martin Committee, the report of the HERT sport was to highlight the need for increased tertiary education funding. In contrast to the earlier submission, however, the report presented the case for elitist and professional forms of education which would fund on increasing opportunities for "disadvantaged" groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and those from lower socio-economic classes. The predominant theme of the earlier document, tertiary education’s contribution to the economy, was invoked in relation to research funding. For the most part, however, the HERT report endeavoured to address the importance of tertiary education’s social role in the face of a perceived overemphasis on the economic role.

The report was, of course, a joint production of FAUSA and other educational associations, and was the most significant transnational reassertion of the elevated status of the university sector. FAUSA’s participation in its production could be seen as primarily a tactical response to the university sector’s perceived role as a counterweight to a system of education, which was often regarded as "upper class." Nevertheless, the involvement of FAUSA in a project which the funding needs of CAEs and TAFE colleges was given equal prominence with those of universities (including a recommendation that more funding be made available for research in CAEs). The HERT report provided some basic, but not always the same, funding for tertiary education, significant to the year following the HERT report, FAUSA (1985) made an additional submission to the Committee of Inquiry on the Status of the Profession in Higher Education (CSTE, 1986). The discussion of undergraduate education was peremptory, that the status of the profession in 1985 based on the proposals, and the 1978 ‘differences’ paper, and in the first two years, was discussed. In 1983, it was raised issues of access and equity, though they were not addressed by the committee. The report’s conclusions are of the utmost importance in its depiction of the attitudes of universities by focusing them with the potential characteristics of CAEs. Indeed, expressed in the difficult to find any direct reference. To CAs in the submission.
FAUSA and the end of the binary system

In 1969, FAUSA was concerned that the binary system of education in the university was no longer fit for purpose. It argued that the traditional system had failed to meet the needs of a modern society and that a new educational system was required. FAUSA, along with other student unions, saw the need for a new system that would provide a more flexible and responsive education. They advocated for the end of the binary system, which they saw as outdated and inefficient.

Looking back

From the beginning, FAUSA's rationale for the end of the binary system was to create a more responsive and flexible education system. They were concerned that the binary system was not meeting the needs of students and society. FAUSA, along with other student unions, saw the need for a new system that would provide a more flexible and responsive education. They advocated for the end of the binary system, which they saw as outdated and inefficient.

Options were open to it. This is particularly relevant in the case of occupationally based schools (e.g., TAFE). For example, in the case of TAFE, the need for vocational education is significant. The political potential of influence on policy. As noted by FAUSA’s General Secretary on the eve of the Democrats reform proposals, “if change occurs, it will not be ‘just a good thing’” (Watt, 1987, p. 2). Whatever the dangers from an academic’s point of view of government interference, perhaps another five years time, if the defence of their continued importance or even existence on the basis of traditional ideals become, during the period examined here, less and less valid, it is not unreasonable to argue that a system which has secured higher education’s future.

The need to be seen as alternating between academia and industry is seen as crucial to securing higher education’s future.

Looking forward

The new system marked the end of one settlement in the on-going competition over the role of higher education, and the end of the competition. Indeed, the issues arising in the 1970s are as complex and substantial as those facing the institutions involved.

Paradoxical: There are two apparently contradictory features of the unitary system:
- Regulation related to a reduced governance commitment to public funding and manifested in the ascendancy of corporate models and the declining significance of public accountability and the state’s role in determining student numbers, in short, a move away from a unitary system towards a more market-oriented, market-driven system.
- A strong desire for autonomy and a desire to escape from the control of the state.

The contrast between the binary system and the unitary system is striking. The binary system is characterized by a clear division between higher education and vocational education. The unitary system, on the other hand, is characterized by a more integrated approach to education, with a greater emphasis on the needs of the student and the society.

The tensions between what university and college academics would be ever present and the struggle to maintain the binary system.

The rise of new forms of education, such as distance learning and online courses, has contributed to the decline of the binary system. These new forms of education are more flexible and allow students to learn at their own pace.

In conclusion, the binary system is no longer fit for purpose. It is time for a new educational system that is more responsive and flexible. The unitary system offers a new approach to education that is more aligned with the needs of society.

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Steering at what distance? The political economy of equity, diversity and quality in the August 1993 Higher Education Budget Statement

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Abstract

The 1993 Higher Education Budget Statement restored and adjusted the Dawkins agenda for Australian higher education to the circumstances of the mid-1990s. This paper addresses the implications of its provisions for equity, diversity and quality, and the larger political and economic imperatives which drive them. It also draws on current models of the governance of public and private systems to examine the ways in which the Federal government has imposed accountability mechanisms on higher education institutions which remain legally responsible for the education of the various States and which also retain substantial institutional autonomy.

Growth, equity and the economic base: A Labourist dilemma

The Federal Labor Government's intentions for higher education from Dawkins (1987, 1988) on have been relatively clear. In broad terms, how education was to be made part of the social character of the state that it would contribute to the national goals of industrial development and economic restructuring. To this end, it was to be restructured into a "unified national system" with "fewer and larger institutions" which would be funded by the Commonwealth on the basis of its mission statement and an educational profile which would include as its objectives, teaching activities, student intake, research activities and management plans, and a statement of intent as to measures to achieve priorities, including equity. To this, "performance indicators" were also to be developed. Institutional amalgamations would enable economies of scale and better educational provision, thus combining educational effectiveness and financial efficiency. The higher education student intake was to be greatly increased, particularly in areas which would contribute to national economic growth. Part of the extra cost would be to fund graduate students and industry contributions (through this last item was changed to a "training levy") while the market for full-time-paying overseas students was to be greatly extended. Access and equity goals for "full participation" of such "disadvantaged groups" at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, women, people with lower incomes or from rural areas, "some migrant groups" and "the disabled" were supported for economic as well as democratic reasons (Dawkins 1988). This program signalled the reorganisation (as contrasted with, for example, neoliberal interventions of a residually social democratic or Labourist party in power during a post-Keynesian period of global and national economic recession.

At issue are several crucial challenges for such a government: How can a nation-wide provision of adequate "social wage" without an adequate fiscal base? How can it provide a range of social services without impeding economic recovery? How much can and should education contribute to the construction of a competitive economy?

How indeed can an economic recovery be managed by the state? How, in the Australian situation, on a Federal state manage and direct an economic recovery and the social wage when many of the functions the course control are constitutionally located with its individual States? And finally, how can a middle-class nation state control and build a political economy in a situation where capital operates globally and the international "playing field" is not necessarily level?

As Masclet and Stalley (1994) point out, the genius of the Federal Labor "solution" initiated by Dawkins and continued by Beazley and Green with regard to higher education, constitutionally the prerogative of the States, can be seen in its greatly expanded provision in at least fiscal terms. It is a situation in which continuing and turbulent economic pressures - in such a situation, "targeted support", "institutional priorities" and "quality reviews" - have a certain face validity. At the same time, however, they signify a managerialist and instrumentalist approach to higher education which is going some way towards transforming universities into semi-autonomous not corporate and market-oriented enterprises. The consequent tensions between Federal regulatory and deregulatory impulses (cf. Henk 1992, Taylor & Henry 1994) constitute a continuing and intractable policy problematic for a Labor government in the 1990s. This is the setting in which this paper addresses the provisions for access, diversity and quality as outlined in the 1993 Higher Education Budget Statement.

Completing the White paper reforms?

The August 1993 Higher Education Budget Statement by the then Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Mr Beazley, may be seen as signifying the view of the Federal Labor Government that, apart from minor modifications and working adjustments "on the move", the work of reforming the higher education sector which began with the Dawkins Green and White Papers and the Wran Report was now largely complete. In the middle ranges it remained and adjusted the Dawkins agenda for Australian higher education to the circumstances of the mid-1990s, recycling themes and phrases from earlier documents, including the Baldwines White Paper (1991), Higher Education: Quality and Diversity in the 1990s. The various changes to funding provisions for higher education make since the 1993 Budget have not substantially altered the broad thrust of its intentions or the parameters of the political economy of Australian higher education which were laid down in the Dawkins era. (It may be significant that there was no specific document published for higher education from the May 1994 Budget).

The Commonwealth government could thus shift focus to address more fully the colossal of other sector of posttertiary education, which was not set in train by the Devoson Report, the National Training Board, the Film/Mayer/Canberra trilogy, and the establishment of the Australian National...