

# 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 Staff Associations (FAUSA) - a national organisation which represented academics in universities in Australia - in relation to the rise and fall of the binary system of higher education in Australia. The binary system, which divided higher education into universities and colleges of advanced education (CAEs), was an important settlement 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 positions on the binary system provide specific examples of change and continuity in the pursuit of "dual closure" (Parkin, 1979). 'Dual closure' is 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 there 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, contestation on this issue was more complex 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 cutbacks, new government steering mechanisms), as to perceived encroachments from below. Similarly, calls for greater access to higher education and a broad conception of its role rarely confronted the question of how academic knowledge itself had been hierarchically constituted.

## Introduction

The significant post-war expansion of higher education in Australia and its transformation from elite to mass provision were accompanied by contestation over its nature and role. Issues of "quality", "diversity" and "equity" featured prominently in the on-going debate. An important settlement designed to address the tensions implicit in reconciling the divergent purposes of higher education during this period was the "binary system" which divided higher education into universities and colleges of advanced education (CAEs). This paper examines the position(s) of the former Federation of Australian University Staff Associations (FAUSA), as set out in various documents produced by and for it, in relation to the rise and fall of the binary system of higher education in Australia.<sup>1</sup> It is argued that these provide specific examples of change and continuity in the pursuit of "dual closure" (Parkin, 1979). Dual closure is a mode of social formation in which power is directed both upwards and downwards and is typically pursued by organisations of the "service class".

## What was FAUSA?

FAUSA was the national organisation which represented academics in universities in Australia. It was formed in 1952 as a loose federation of academic staff associations and was originally known as the Federal Council of University Staff Associations of Australia (FCUSAA). It operated for most of its history primarily as a quasi-professional association. In the 1980s, however, it registered as a trade union<sup>2</sup> and

affiliated with the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). In 1993, in the context of the collapse of the binary system of higher education, FAUSA amalgamated with several other unions representing academic and non-academic staff in institutions of higher education to become the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU).

## Academics, class and closure

Unions have been considered to be archetypally *class-based* organisations. This assumption presents few problems in relation to blue-collar workers' organisations, but considerable difficulties for the analysis of the nature and role of white-collar organisations. Amongst those who take the issue of delineating the class-relatedness of the aims and activities of white-collar unions seriously<sup>3</sup>, there are three general positions:

- that the aims and activities of these organisations may be considered generally consonant with those of working-class organisations;<sup>4</sup>
- that the aims and activities of these organisations place them in conflict with the working class and its organisations;<sup>5</sup>
- that the aims and activities of these organisations are 'contradictory'.<sup>6</sup>

Parkin (1979) has developed an approach which is consistent with the third position. He describes class primarily in terms of the prevalent modes of 'social closure' which he defines as the various means by which power is mobilised by groups engaged in distributional struggles in society (Parkin, 1979, pp. 44-46). Attempts at closure are of two possible types: 'exclusion', where power is directed downwards against a subordinate group to restrict their access to rewards and opportunities enjoyed by the group exercising closure and 'usurpation', where power is directed upwards against a superordinate group in order to expand access by the group exercising this power to rewards and opportunities.

Attempts to secure closure involve both action and ideology. Ideally, for example, usurpation consists of strategic manoeuvring and the articulation of a socially progressive discourse, what Marx called 'praxis'.

The proletariat typically pursues usurpational closure, while the bourgeoisie typically pursues exclusionary closure. In Parkin's view, however, it is not the social location of those who initiate collective action that determines whether the action is exclusionary or usurpational, but the social location of the group(s) against which the action is directed. Intermediate groups are therefore likely to pursue 'dual closure', that is, closure based both on exclusion and usurpation. Pursuit of dual closure involves not only positions/actions which are *alternately* exclusionary and usurpational, but positions/actions which are *simultaneously* exclusionary and usurpational.

Parkin agrees with Marxists that property relations must be regarded as an important basis for social closure in modern capitalist societies. However, he argues that other bases of closure operate as well. Specifically, he identifies knowledge-based modes of closure based on academic or professional qualifications and credentials. These have particular relevance in the case of the "middle classes"<sup>7</sup> and, in

Parkin's view, can be comparable in importance for class formation to property.

A number of other writers have written of the use which the "middle", "service" or "professional/managerial" class has made of closure based on knowledge (see, for example, Gouldner, 1979; the Ehrenreichs, 1979; Abercrombie and Urry, 1983; Jamrozik, 1991). This class, which manages, administers, provides technical expertise and reproduces capitalist culture on behalf of capital, also struggles to secure its own interests, which can place it in an antagonistic relationship to capital. Typically this involves evocation of an ideology of objectivity, rationality and individual autonomy - what Gouldner (1979, p. 28) calls the 'culture of critical discourse'.<sup>8</sup> While this discourse is potentially subversive to the established social order, it is not usually consonant with the interests of the working class, as a precondition for the intellectual and rational discourse of the service class is the separation of mental and manual labour, the privileging of the former and its appropriation by the service class from the working class.

The attempt by the service class to establish critical discourse as hegemonic is an example of the contradictions implicit in dual closure. On the one hand, the social progressiveness and universality of the discourse is asserted and an attempt is made to spread its influence. On the other hand, such an inclusive project is inconsistent with, and potentially threatens, the hierarchical nature of the discourse.

Parkin (1979) argues that both the professional and industrial activities of service class organisations need to be seen as related to the protection of the group's material interests (and, therefore, as potentially either or both exclusionary and usurpational). He also draws a distinction between the general mode of social closure and the actual tactics used in pursuing it. Exclusionary closure is typically pursued via legislative (or institutional) tactics, usurpational closure through solidaristic tactics. However, 'attempts at usurpation via legislation... and exclusion via solidarism... are not uncommon' (Parkin, 1979, p. 98). This means that usurpational ideology and goals cannot be automatically read off from the use of solidaristic tactics, nor is the use of legalistic tactics necessarily a sign that the organisation has primarily exclusionary ideology and goals.

Parkin's dual closure approach provides a way of analysing the policies and practices of a service class organisation such as FAUSA. Among the developments in FAUSA's history which appear particularly suitable for such an analytical approach were its increasingly industrial orientation, its defences of academic freedom, its eventual incorporation into the Australian industrial relations system, internal organisational changes over the years and its changing relationships with other unions and the labour movement generally. In this paper the concept of dual closure will be applied to FAUSA's positions relative to the binary system.

## The binary system

The binary system of higher education in Australia developed as a result of the *Report of the Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia* (known as the Martin Report) in 1964. Higher Education was divided into two sectors, the "traditional" university sector (in which FAUSA's affiliated bodies had coverage of academic staff) and the "new" CAEs which were to be created from a variety of institutions offering primarily vocational and technical courses<sup>9</sup>.

The binary system sought to allow for a dramatic expansion of access to higher education, but to contain the costs of this expansion and preserve the academic "quality" and research function of the universities. CAEs were intended to cater for students who would have previously been denied enrolment at a university but who wanted access to higher education and for whom there were social and/or economic arguments for making this access possible. In the view of the Martin Committee at least, while there was room for an increase in the number of university places, the major expansion of places should be in institutions which emphasised teaching rather than research and would have a more localised and directly vocational focus than

universities. An important appeal of this approach was that CAEs would be cheaper to fund.

The differences between universities and CAEs were never absolute, however, and became increasingly less distinct and capable of justification as time went on. The original purpose was purportedly to create institutions which were "equal but different". This description proved inaccurate on both counts. CAEs were not seen to be institutions of equal worth to universities and they adopted a number of university practices. By the late 1980s, for example, all CAEs offered degree level courses and some offered degrees at the doctoral level. The extent to which developments such as these could be said to derive from flaws in the original conception of 'institutes of colleges', as Martin called them, or to flaws in the implementation of the concept or, indeed, not to flaws at all but to a natural evolutionary response to social and economic change is a moot point. For all the indistinctness of the divide between the two types of institutions, the binary system endured for nearly twenty-five years until the reforms initiated by Labor Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins in the late 1980s.

## FCUSAA and the Martin Committee review

The FCUSAA (1962) submission to the Martin Committee incorporated a number of "progressive" features. FCUSAA took a wide view of tertiary education, arguing for the improvement and expansion not only of universities, but of technical and teacher education (and secondary education) as well. It rejected the concept of community or junior colleges based on the American model (reported to be an option favourably regarded by Martin), basing this rejection on the view that 'the emphasis [in the review]... should not be on setting up *a lower level* of tertiary education, but on providing a greater range and flexibility of choices' (FCUSAA, 1962, p. 80, emphasis in the original). Though FCUSAA favoured an approach which would 'improve the effectiveness of *existing* institutions of tertiary and secondary education' (idem., emphasis added), the submission acknowledged,

*the growth in size and scope of the demand for tertiary education... is leading to a widespread view that the expansion of facilities requires the development of both a wider range of institutions and a wider range of qualifications.* (ibid., p. 73)

It canvassed sympathetically several options including the development of 'colleges of advanced technology' on the British model.

The FCUSAA submission acknowledged that universities themselves were undergoing 'a profound revolution' in terms of the definition of their functions (ibid., p. 77), a revolution which it related to 'demographic, economic and social influences' (ibid., p. 67). While the submission noted that the maintenance of standards in the face of increased demand for places was an often expressed concern, it pointed out that 'attempts to test the hypothesis [that "more means worse"] suggest that it is not borne out by the facts' (ibid., p. 77). Thus, FCUSAA embraced the possibilities for broadening and improving the role of tertiary education presented by social and economic change rather than defending existing provision against any supposed onslaught of the barbarians.

The submission also took a progressive stance in relation to issues such as the democratisation of the internal governance of universities and other tertiary institutions, on articulation with secondary education and on selection procedures.

Despite the fact that FCUSAA argued for a broad vision of tertiary education and for an expansion of tertiary education opportunities, it advanced the case for this expansion almost exclusively on economic grounds: on market demand due to demographic factors and especially on the basis of human capital theory, citing research by Peter Karmel which indicated that "education has directly beneficial effects on production and the rate of economic growth; in a sense, it pays for itself, like investment in capital equipment" (ibid., p. 76).

There was no specific mention of social justice issues (e.g. those relating to class, gender, race, ethnicity) in the submission. Even in observing that existing tertiary selection procedures denied some able students access to higher education, the submission avoided entering

into such a debate. The procedures were described as 'unreliable' rather than inequitable (ibid., p. 79). In this context it should also be noted that the arguments for the expansion of tertiary education in the submission were made in the context where fewer than 7 per cent of persons aged 17-22 were university students and only about 12 per cent were in tertiary education more widely defined (see Martin, vol. 1, 1964, pp. 34-35). It would probably not be inaccurate to describe the expansion of access to tertiary education contemplated in the submission as a call for an expansion of opportunities *within* the middle classes (if not within the service class), rather than across the middle and working classes. The submission noted that 'more families are moving into groups where there is both the will and the ability to support children through long schooling' (FCUSAA, 1962, p. 70) and left unexamined the situation of those who fall outside of these groups. It also occasionally betrayed a more pronounced class bias as in its observation that 'one of the major criticisms of technological training under the present conditions is that it is possible to obtain a first class honours degree in a technological discipline without ever reading a single work of genius' (ibid., p. 76) - genius evidently being the exclusive preserve of non-technological areas of study!

## FAUSA and the FSAACAE

If FCUSAA's submission to the Martin Committee exhibited a willingness to embrace a vision of tertiary education in which a variety of institutions and courses met a 'complex and heterogeneous range of demands' (ibid., p. 70), its successor FAUSA showed little interest in recruiting members in the CAEs once they became established. It appears that such an expansion of membership was so foreign to the conception which university staff associations had of themselves and their national organisation that it was not even raised as a matter for discussion. An alternative national organisation, the Federation of Staff Associations of Australian Colleges of Advanced Education (FSAACAE), was established for college academics in 1968.

In 1969 the Sweeney Inquiry into the salaries of academics established equal salaries for academics in the CAE and university sectors who were doing work at comparable levels. Sweeney took seriously the notion that CAEs were "equal but different" and felt that this ought to be reflected in salary levels. It was known, however, that this view was not shared by FAUSA and the issue became a source of tension between FAUSA and the FSAACAE coming to a head in the Academic Salaries Tribunal in 1976 where, in line with the position adopted by FAUSA, the nexus in salary scales established by Sweeney was abandoned.

## Defining the differences

In the early 1970s FAUSA wrote to State and Federal Ministers for Education asking them to define the differences between CAEs and universities and the policy implications of these differences. Professor L.N. Short made use of the responses to prepare a paper for the organisation's annual general meeting in 1972.

Short began his paper by observing that the binary system in Australia,

*parallels the... binary system of higher education in England, which Burgess and Pratt<sup>10</sup> describe in terms of two persistent traditions: the 'university tradition', academic and exclusive, concerned with the preservation, extension and dissemination of knowledge for its own sake; and the 'technical-college tradition', inclusive, concerned with vocational and professional education, and emphasising teaching rather than research.* (Short, 1972, p. 1)

Short then reviewed the Ministers' responses, as well as statements about the binary system from other sources, including from the Martin Report. He described a general pattern ('widely held views', ibid., p. 9) in which the traditions identified by Burgess and Pratt were invoked, but watered down so that the difference between the institutions was portrayed as one of emphasis rather than clear-cut distinction. The hierarchical structuring of knowledge was plainly evident but unacknowledged in the statements, which emphasised the concept of equal but different.

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 universities and they misrepresented the universities as timeless bastions with 'all the flexibility and change being attributed to the colleges' (idem.). Short concluded by calling for a breaking down of the distinctions between CAEs and universities by drawing on the strengths of both traditions identified by Burgess and Pratt:

*No convincing case has been presented for the preservation of essentially different types of institution. If the universities are to maintain their vitality and survive they may need to acquire certain characteristics of colleges; if the colleges are to achieve excellence as institutions of higher education they must certainly accept methods and functions traditionally associated with universities. Some institutions will have a limited range of academic programs and research activities while others will be more broadly based; but all would appear to be engaged in what is essentially the same enterprise.* (ibid., p. 21)

A short, unattributed paper (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, simultaneously agreeing with and casting doubt on Short's conclusions. It urged further study of the matter and recommended that a committee be formed for this purpose.

By 1977 FAUSA had come around to a position diametrically opposed to that of Short. In its main submission to the Inquiry into Education and Training (Williams, 1979) it asserted that 'there is an intrinsic difference between universities and other institutions in terms of their general educational goals, their standards and their ethos' (FAUSA, 1977, p. 4). It elaborated on this with a follow-up paper entitled 'Universities and Colleges of Advanced Education -- Defining the Differences' (FAUSA, 1978). This paper described itself in the following terms:

*The document differs from... [earlier] submissions in emphasising distinguishing characteristics in an assertive manner, and in not attempting to emphasise references to quotations and statements of individuals and institutions expert in tertiary education... The statement on differences thus made is a statement of what the differences should be. In some cases the differences clearly exist already; in other cases current distinctions are not as clear or as adequate as the ideal embodied in the statement.* (FAUSA, 1978, p. 1, emphasis in original)

It continued:

*The document can be considered as elitist and we make no apology for this. Universities are by definition elitist intellectual institutions.* (idem.)

The paper was a series of assertions unsupported by evidence or argument. Australian universities were portrayed as distinguishable from CAEs on a number of grounds. They were homogeneous institutions; CAEs were not. They offered higher level and research-based degrees. Even in their vocationally oriented courses they were differentiated from CAEs by their emphasis on 'training the intellect and developing the scholarship of students' (ibid., p. 3). Universities encouraged self-directed learning while CAEs emphasised teaching. University academic staff were more highly qualified and 'better known' (ibid., p. 5) than CAE staff. They had a greater commitment to research. Tenure was a matter of protecting academic freedom in the universities; in the CAEs it was primarily an issue of job security. Universities were autonomous institutions with long-term goals; accountability was to an international community of scholars. CAEs were less autonomous, had shorter term goals, and were more directly answerable to national and state governments.

The tone and focus of the 1978 paper were clearly exclusionary. It was intended as a defence of the university from encroachments from below. Ironically, however, what sparked the production of this paper was a threat from above. In the late 1970s the "long boom" in Australian higher education had ended and the Australian Government of Malcolm Fraser was contemplating significant cutbacks in higher

education funding and reductions of academic conditions (through assaults on study leave and tenure, for example). Thus, though there is little evidence of it in the rhetoric of the document, it can be considered an attempt to articulate a strategy of dual closure.

Interestingly, the document distinguished not just between universities and CAEs, but between 'Group A' CAEs and 'Group B' CAEs. The former included 'all central institutes of technology' (ibid., p. 2) and the latter most of the former teachers colleges. While the document averred that 'we do not place much weight on the second point of demarcation' (ibid., p. 1), the distinction later took on a greater importance for FAUSA.

The 1978 paper drew a response from the Macquarie University Staff Association at the 1979 FAUSA AGM. The Macquarie representatives moved a motion rejecting elitist and divisive approaches to higher education and calling on FAUSA to avoid formulating policies which might undermine conditions in CAEs. Their supporting argument described the assumptions underlying the 1978 paper as 'dubious', and concluded that 'FAUSA should in future refrain from supporting the binary policy' and work in solidarity with CAE staff (FAUSA, 1979b, pp. 1-2). At the meeting, the motion was amended so that its reference to rejecting elitism and divisiveness were deleted. The same meeting received a response to the Williams Report (FAUSA, 1979a) in which FAUSA reaffirmed its view that stricter controls needed to be placed on CAEs to stop them from emulating universities.

## FAUSA in the 80s

By the early 1980s, changes in higher education had made adherence to an 'idealised' conception of the binary system as set out in the 1978 paper even less tenable. Several CAEs had been amalgamated with universities and at least one other (the Western Australian Institute of Technology) was on the verge of claiming university status. Considering the changed terrain in a paper prepared for FAUSA in 1982, Noble argued (in strangely unacademic prose) that 'the research and autonomy image still has market value... we can shriek "totalitarianism!"... if they monkey around with it' (Noble, 1982, p. 3). His recommendation was for FAUSA to accept...

*... 'into the fold'... those colleges that are 'making it' in our (research-autonomy) terms. In other words we turn the propaganda that keeps all of us feeling warm during the long nights outward, and far from maintaining a 'fortress university' style (this has characterised us for too long), we search the landscape for others able and willing to join us -- at the same time making the idea of joining us quite alluring. I would see terms like 'academic maturity', 'intellectual trustworthiness', 'critical thought' and the like featuring prominently in any discussion of the merits of institutions of higher education that are moving through the spectrum from 'the single-purpose ideologically blinkered State Teachers College' to 'the internationally-oriented, socially-critical, research-and-autonomous university.'* (Noble, 1982, p. 4)

Heeding Noble's advice, some FAUSA senior officers investigated the possibility of extending its membership into what the 1978 "differences" paper had termed Group A CAEs. This idea was rejected by FAUSA's Council. Such a move would have brought it into conflict with the FSAACAE's successor, the Federation of College Academics (FCA)<sup>11</sup>, with which FAUSA would fight a battle over sole coverage of academics at the WAIT when it became Curtin University in 1986.

While it fought battles with the FCA in this period, FAUSA also sought to co-operate with it. It was becoming clear that, even if they were not of the same cut as university academics, college academics were useful allies. In 1981, the two organisations (along with the Australian Union of Students (AUS) and later the Australian Teachers' Federation (ATF)) formed the Higher Education Round Table (HERT). In 1982 FAUSA and the FCA made a joint submission to the Academic Salaries Tribunal. A paper produced by FAUSA in 1982 suggested that, despite the fact that 'many individual members... would recoil from such an idea' (FAUSA, 1982, p. 3), the issue of amalgamation with the FCA should be explored. Interestingly, it advanced as an

argument in support of this suggestion the possibility that the FCA might amalgamate with the ATF and

*...given the degree of co-operation which will still be necessary between the university and college staff sectors in the future, it is not entirely impossible that FAUSA may find itself forced into a similar close relationship with the ATF and possible eventual absorption. Such a prospect would worry most members of FAUSA even more than convergence and eventual merger with the FCA.* (idem.)

Even when presented in these terms, however, such a proposal was unacceptable to at least some of FAUSA's affiliates. The University of New South Wales Staff Association (UNSWSA, 1983) responded that, while increased co-operation between FAUSA, the FCA and the ATF on 'matters of interest to 2 or more sectors' was worthwhile,

*...matters which emerge from the unique characteristics of Universities naturally occupy a substantial portion of the time and energies of the Federation and its constituent members... FAUSA should not hesitate to take on the role of a small, specialised Association representing the interests of a sector with significantly different characteristics, conditions, aims and purposes which are recognised by the world community as being unique to Universities.* (UNSWSA, 1983)

In 1984 HERT produced a booklet entitled *The Tertiary Education Report: Education Unions Report to the Australian Public*. The approach in this document can be contrasted not only with the self-admitted elitism of the 'differences' paper (FAUSA, 1978), but also with the earlier submission to the Martin Committee (FCUSAA, 1962). As has been noted above, while the Martin submission articulated a broad conception of higher education, it was conspicuously silent on issues of social justice. The 1984 report, on the other hand, proclaimed a concern about the question of 'what can be done to increase access to tertiary education for socially and educationally disadvantaged groups' (HERT, 1984, p. 4).

Like the Martin submission, a main purpose of the HERT report was to highlight the need for increased tertiary education funding. In contrast to the earlier submission, however, it presented the case for additional funding largely in terms of the effects that improved funding would have on increasing opportunities for 'disadvantaged' groups such as Aborigines, women, migrants, those with disabilities and those from lower socio-economic classes. The predominant theme of the earlier document, tertiary education's contribution to the economy, was invoked primarily in relation to research funding. For the most part, however, the HERT report endeavoured to assert the importance of tertiary education's social role in the face of a perceived overemphasis on its economic dimensions.

The HERT report was, of course, a joint production of FAUSA and other education unions and could hardly have been a vehicle for a reassertion of the elevated status of the university sector. FAUSA's participation in its production could be seen as primarily a tactical response to a particular crisis rather than as a repudiation of its formerly 'elitist' position.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the involvement of FAUSA in a project in 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), and social justice issues were highlighted as the basis for increased funding for tertiary education, was significant.

In the year following the HERT report, FAUSA (1985) made an individual submission to the Committee of Review on Efficiency and Effectiveness in Higher Education (CTEC, 1986). The description of universities in this submission was not inconsistent with that given earlier in the 1978 'differences' paper. It differed in two main ways. First, it raised issues of access and equity, though they were not given the prominence that they had in the HERT report. Second, it downplayed the elitism implicit in its depiction of the attributes of universities by not directly contrasting them with the purported characteristics of CAEs. Indeed, except in one appendix, it is difficult to find any direct reference to CAEs in the submission.



## FAUSA and the end of the binary system

In early 1987, FAUSA's General Secretary addressed the question of the future of the binary system in his column in the organisation's newsletter (Wallis, 1987, p. 2). He suggested several possibilities:

- that the binary system might survive with institutions of technology crossing over 'to the university side' (idem.);
- that the binary system might evolve into a 'continuum... with substantially research-oriented universities at one end, the small single purpose colleges at the other' (idem.);
- that the binary system might break down in unanticipated ways.

He observed,

*FAUSA has been one of the staunchest defenders of maintaining the binary system, but a point may come - indeed it may already have been reached - where there is no logic in the system we are defending.* (idem.)

Interestingly, he noted that there was an 'increasing divergence between our educational policies and our industrial policies' (idem.). On the one hand, FAUSA had been calling for a greater expansion of opportunities in higher education and a broad range of provision; on the other, it defended the superior status of universities. While FAUSA was charged with the responsibility of defending the working conditions of its members, he observed, it had adopted educational policy aims which went 'beyond the bounds of its members' immediate interests' (idem.).

He concluded by noting that FAUSA Council would be examining the "pros and cons" of amalgamation with the FCA:

*The Federated Council of Academics has already declared itself prepared to amalgamate with FAUSA, but to this point the suggestion has always been rejected out of hand by FAUSA... To some members, no doubt, the notion of an amalgamation with college academics would be unthinkable; to many, the notion would be seen as a serious threat to their current working conditions, particularly as far as teaching loads and access to research resources are concerned.* (idem.)

The demise of the binary system was signaled later that year in the Dawkins (1987) Green Paper on Higher Education. FAUSA and the FCA co-operated in 1988 to produce a joint response. *Thinking Ahead - Planning Growth in Australian Higher Education: A Framework* (FAUSA/FCA, 1988) was a fairly substantial document covering a wide range of issues in 12 chapters and making 37 recommendations in its 83 pages of small print.

*Thinking Ahead* reproduced and developed many of the arguments put in the HERT report. It devoted, for example, a good deal of attention to issues of access and equity in higher education. Like the HERT paper it also shared features with the FCUSAA submission to the Martin Committee, particularly in its call for increased higher education funding, its affirmation that 'higher education institutions have multiple objectives [and]... a number of distinctive purposes' (ibid., p. 9), in its emphasis on democratic decision making within these institutions (ibid., pp. 15-16), and in its support for intra-institutional diversity (ibid., pp. 35-36).

*Thinking Ahead* took the strategy of welcoming CAEs into the university fold a good deal further than the HERT paper, however, by accepting the Green Paper's recommendations that the binary system be ended and replaced with a unitary system of higher education. It observed that 'the binary system was based on a dubious hierarchy of institutions, the rationale for which no longer exists' (FAUSA/FCA, 1988, p. 2). An important chapter in the document was devoted to developing a model of a unitary system in which the right balance was struck between institutional autonomy and academic freedom on the one hand and public accountability on the other. Features of the model included adequate funding, a range of institutions, a diversity of programs, improved participation and access, the expansion of research capacity and opportunities, the equal valuing of teaching and research, negotiated institutional educational profiles and co-ordina-

tion through statutory authorities. Unsurprisingly, the system of higher education which was ushered in with the demise of the binary system failed to share key features of the FAUSA/FCA model. Perhaps most importantly, it laid far more emphasis on principles of economic and organisational efficiency.

It took FAUSA and the FCA - now both representing university academics - another five years to amalgamate. True to form, while the amalgamation ballot was carried overwhelmingly by FCA members, the margin in FAUSA was much narrower. The anti-amalgamation case was not, however, argued on the basis of defending a binary distinction that no longer existed. It was based on the opposition by some to the inclusion of non-academic staff in the NTEU and on concerns about the centralisation of power in the new organisation.

## Looking back

From the beginning there had been two contradictory impulses in FCUSAA/FAUSA's response to the binary system, one which sought to undermine its distinctions and one which sought to reinforce them. These impulses can be related to Parkin's concept of dual closure, a mode of social formation pursued by organisations of the service class. The service class is seen to pursue both usurpational and exclusionary closure, to be in the words of Gouldner (1979, pp. 84-85) 'both emancipatory and elitist'.

In its submission to the Martin Committee, FCUSAA advocated a broad vision of higher education, but failed to link this apparently progressive vision with a social justice agenda. In the 1970s, there were further statements advocating a breaking down of the binary divide, but in 1978 FAUSA issued a statement of unequivocal support for the maintenance and strengthening of that system. Social, industrial and educational changes in the early 1980s made adherence to this position unviable. By the mid-1980s the strategies pursued by groups articulating emancipatory and elitist agendas shared a number of important features. Both sought to broaden FAUSA's membership either by "welcoming into the fold" academics from at least some of the colleges or through amalgamation with the FCA. Both also sought to work with college academics to "put the case" for higher education.

In the 1980s FAUSA's increasingly industrial orientation, its incorporation into the Australian industrial relations system and its affiliation with the ACTU were all apparent repudiations of isolationism and elitism. Though FAUSA did not officially move from its support for the binary system until Dawkins had signalled its demise, in the mid to late 1980s it returned to a broad view of higher education in its policies and publications. FAUSA started to move towards and then was inexorably drawn by events (such as the Dawkins White Paper and the ACTU push for industry unions) ever closer to amalgamation with the FCA.

Throughout the history of FCUSAA/FAUSA, 'exclusionary' and 'usurpational' positions and activists can be identified. Nevertheless, the organisation's development was more complex than a series of skirmishes between those who pursued an emancipatory agenda and those who pursued an elitist one. Three points can be made in this regard.

First, as noted above, exclusionary closure can be pursued through solidaristic activities. The organisational and policy changes of the 1980s, for example, though they opened up the organisation to co-operation with the college sector, were not necessarily a repudiation of exclusionary closure. There were certainly those within FAUSA who supported the use of solidaristic tactics for reasons which had nothing to do with any commitment to the broader struggle of the labour movement. In the event, these activists found themselves allied on strategy matters with those who were committed to this struggle.

Second, it needs to be recognised that closure is as much a matter of practical strategy and action as it is of ideology. An analysis such as this one, which concentrates on written policies and other materials, downplays or leaves out crucial elements of the social, political and economic contexts and processes. To know where an organisation stood on an issue is important, but it is at least equally important to know whether it was in a position to do anything about it and what

options were open to it. This is particularly relevant in the case of an organisation such as FAUSA which had only a limited amount of potential influence on policy. As noted by FAUSA's General Secretary on the eve of the Dawkins reform proposals, 'if change occurs, it will be the system that changes FAUSA, and not vice-versa' (Wallis, 1987, p. 2). Whatever the dangers from an academic's point of view of greater incorporation of universities into the state, for example, a defence of their continued importance or even existence on the basis of traditional ideals became, during the period examined here, less and less viable. Thus, state sponsorship exacted some high costs, but also secured higher education's future.

Third, the operation of dual closure should not be seen as alternating periods of ascendancy for usurpational and exclusionary modes of closure. Rather these modes operate *simultaneously*; in this case, for example, it is more appropriate to see *both* the impulse to support the binary system and the impulse to dismantle it as manifesting *both* exclusionary and usurpational elements. The defence of the status of universities was a project designed to assert the importance of "critical discourse" as much in the face of interventions and assaults from above (e.g. funding cutbacks, new government steering mechanisms), as from encroachments from below. Similarly, calls for greater access to higher education and a broad conception of its role rarely confronted the question of how "critical discourse" itself had been hierarchically constituted. This is *not* to argue, however, that the progressive possibilities of all attempts at closure by members of the service class are equal - that is clearly not the case. It is to argue that analysis of these and counter-vailing possibilities is a complex matter and any one position is likely to involve ambiguous and contradictory elements.

## Looking forward

The end of the binary system marked the end of one settlement in the on-going contestation over the role of higher education, not the end of the contestation. Indeed, the issues arising in the 1990s are as complex and challenging as ever.

There are two apparently contradictory features of the unitary system:

- *regulation* related to a reduced government commitment to public funding and manifested in the ascendancy of corporate managerialism, an emphasis on efficiency and productivity, assaults on academic working conditions and a push for curriculum standardisation at the undergraduate level;
- *deregulation* related to the location of higher education within the economy and manifested in institutional competition, commercialisation and privatisation.

The combined effect of these features is to reinforce inequalities. There is likely to be a re-assertion of elitism. An institutional hierarchy within higher education has already emerged (and the development of a new binarism between TAFE and higher education is likely).

Former NTEU (and FAUSA) Research Officer Mandy Leveratt (1994) has observed that while the new institutional hierarchy reflects in the main that embodied in the old binary divide, the current re-articulation of elitism is potentially more effective in that it is linked far more directly to market criteria through the commodification of knowledge and competition between tertiary institutions. In her view, *it will not be enough in future to simply reiterate the well-worn phrases about 'liberal' education when the face of higher education has been irrevocably changed.* (ibid., p. 13)

The tensions between what were university and college academics will now be an intra-union problem centering on the "new" (but actually well-established) differences in institutional status. Though the NTEU has been a strong critic of the commodification of higher education and of the establishment of an institutional hierarchy, as the effects of these developments become ever more pronounced and more significant in securing advantageous salaries and working conditions for some of its members, this position may become more contentious. The option of being a small, specialised professional association is not open to the NTEU - though, interestingly, there are calls from some

within academia for such an association to be formed separately from the union (see, for example, Aitkin, 1992). It may be that any socially progressive potential of the amalgamation of FAUSA and the FCA/UACA will be unrealised as academics who are relatively advantaged by the new order look to alternative, non-union vehicles of effecting social closure.

The NTEU is not what FAUSA used to be but, then, FAUSA at the end was also not what FAUSA used to be. The NTEU is unlike FAUSA ever was in several respects: it incorporates academics across the range of higher education institutions, it includes non-academic staff amongst its membership to a much greater degree, and it has an organisational structure which is suited to a solidaristic rather than an individualistic approach. That the NTEU is more "unionate" (see Brigden, 1989) than FAUSA and encompasses a wider membership does not mean, however, that it will not face the same types of dilemmas as FAUSA did. The NTEU shares important characteristics with FAUSA: its membership, if more heterogeneous, is still largely drawn from the service class and it is still a relatively marginal player in the social policy debates which shape higher education.

As an organisation of the service class it will undoubtedly pursue dual closure. Those activists who seek to put in place a progressive or emancipatory agenda are likely to be better served by recognising this than by denying it.

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## Footnotes

1. The author gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of the National Tertiary Education Union, the University of Queensland Staff Association, the Griffith University Faculty Staff Association and the Noel Butlin Archives of Business and Labour at the Australian National University, which provided access to their files.

2. Briefly as the Association of Australian University Staff (AAUS), then as the Federated Australian University Staff Association (preserving the acronym FAUSA).

3. Hindess (1989) argues the case against pursuing class as an issue in the analysis of the activities of collective organisations.

4. This can be argued on the basis that all those who work for a salary or wage belong to the working class (see, for example, Smith and Willmott, 1991). It is also in effect the position of those who ignore class as an issue in analysing collective organisations of employees.

5. See, for example, Goldthorpe (1982).

6. This term is most often associated with the work of Wright (e.g. 1983, 1985).

7. The heterogeneity of groups in the middle has been much noted and led to debate about whether to consider them a class at all (see Smith and Willmott, 1991) and about whether to consider them as several classes. Parkin's (1979) approach, by emphasising the importance of modes of social closure, accords less importance to structural categorisation based on the mode of production and accepts the existence of more than one middle class. Thus, it is not argued that academics and low level clerical workers are a part of the same "middle class".

8. Gouldner acknowledges that there are humanistic and technocratic strands of critical discourse which are often in conflict with each other. This conflict has relevance to the rise and fall of the binary system, but is not examined in this paper.

9. CAEs, as they were constituted, did not exactly reflect the recommendations of the Martin Report. Martin had, for example, recommended a third category of tertiary education: Boards of Teacher Education. This was not taken up. Teachers Colleges became CAEs in 1972.

10. The work cited is Burgess, T. and Pratt, J. (1970) *Policy and Practice: The Colleges of Advanced Technology*, London, Allen Lane.

11. Later known as the Federated Council of Academics and also as a registered federal union as the Union of Australian College Academics (UACA).

12. The document solves the problem of the differing perspectives of the FCA and FAUSA by an authorial conceit that the roles of CAEs and universities are understood by the reader and do not therefore need to be discussed. Given the emphasis in the document on the social purposes of tertiary education and on the promotion of social equality, failure to address the relationship between the sectors in tertiary education is a noteworthy silence.

# 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 restated 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 drove 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 the responsibility 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 rehearsed many times. Put briefly, higher education was to make a key contribution 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' each of 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 load, graduations, research activities and management plan, and 'a statement of intent on measures to achieve national priorities, including equity'. To this end, '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 financed from taxation on graduates and industry contributions (though this last item was changed to a "training levy") while the market for full fee-paying overseas students was to be greatly extended. Access and equity goals for 'full participation' of such 'disadvantaged groups' as Aborigines and Torres Straits 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 neocorporatist (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-state provide an 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, can a Federal state manage and direct an economy and the social wage when many of the functions it seeks to control are constitutionally located with its individual States? And finally, how can a middle-level nation state control and build its economy in a situation where capital operates globally and the international "playing field" is most certainly not level?

As Maslen and Slattery (1994) point out, the genius of the Federal Labor "solution" initiated by Dawkins and continued by Beazley and Crean with regard to higher education, constitutionally the prerogative of the States, can be seen in its greatly expanded provision at least financial cost in a period of continuing and turbulent economic recession. In such a situation, "targeted support", "institutional profiles" and "quality reviews" have a certain face validity. At the same time, however, they signify a managerial and instrumentalist approach to higher education which is going some way towards transforming universities into semi-autonomous but corporate and market-oriented enterprises. The consequent tensions between Federal regulatory and deregulatory impulses (cf. Henry 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 17 pages it restated 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 Baldwin White Paper (1991), *Higher Education: Quality and Diversity in the 1990s*. The various changes to funding provisions for higher education made 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 reforms of that other sector of postcompulsory education, vocational education and training, which had been set in train by the Deveson Report, the National Training Board, the Finn/Mayer/Carmichael trilogy, and the establishment of the Australian National