

# AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

## PRESS RELEASE 639#

### The Human Cost of TAFE Privatisation

More than sixty years ago, in the 1960s, religious interests began a politically organised effort to privatise public education. Well-meaning Australians were snookered by talk of 'Needs' policies and 'declining' standards. In the 1980s corporate interests joined the privatisation push and started to undermine the technical education system. Religious and private interests have waited, like jackals, on the sidelines, hoping to pick up a few of the pieces. This they have done to the tune of billions of taxpayer dollars.

How have we come to the pass where our young people are burdened with tens of thousands of dollars debt and nothing to show for it?

In the 1980s secondary Technical schools which offered alternative curricula and trained children wishing to become 'tradies' - were closed. Religious interests had taken over the Education Department and Joan Kirner imported Jean Blackburn to do their dirty work. These much-loved technical schools were expensive to run and depended upon the initiative of what some called 'bushranger' principals.

Then, in 1982 the TAFE sector was taken out from under the Education Department. It has been downhill since then, until, under neo-liberal policies, they have, in recent years, been hurtled further down the slippery slope and into the slough of privatisation.

**What does privatisation really mean?** It means the alienation of the public estate at public expense to profiteers. The new private colleges have and are failing miserably in providing the next generation with adequate skills for employment or indeed, survival. Corruption scandals are surfacing like mushrooms in Spring while taxpayers and their children are much the poorer.

#### **The human Face of the TAFE Privatisation Fiasco: Profiteering at Students' Expense:**

Henrietta Cook, in *The Age* of 26 January 2016 told the story of what happened to 61 members of the Turkish community signed up to a diploma in community service at Keystone College. The lady who signed them up, a well-known Turkish singer called Birsal Akbulut, staged a hunger strike outside the college in an attempt claw back the \$19,000 debt

incurred by migrants to whom she had been persuaded to sell the courses. Henrietta Cook wrote:

*Ms Akbulut said she was approached in August by education broker National Training and Development – which sells courses for Keystone College – and offered a job as an "independent course adviser".*

*She said she was offered \$600 for every student she signed up, and is still owed money.*

*An audit by the Australian Skills Quality Authority, the national regulator for vocational education and training, previously found that Keystone College was not complying with rules covering the assessment of students before enrolment.*

*In a report released last year, the regulator said the college had improved its practices to address this issue, but would be monitored.*

*The federal government has moved to rein in the industry by amending laws and freezing funding to private colleges accessing VET FEE-HELP – a HECS-style loans system for vocational training students – to 2015 levels.*

*A spokeswoman for Keystone College said the community services course that many Turkish students were enrolled in was being superseded in August and they were concerned some students would not complete it in time.*

*"We are therefore trying to provide as many opportunities as possible for the students to successfully complete their chosen qualification. One of the options is for the students to withdraw from their current studies and enrol (at no additional cost) into the new qualification."*

*But she said new government regulations meant that VET FEE-HELP students needed a high school certificate or to complete a government-approved literacy and numeracy test.*

*"The test is difficult for those applying to study who do not speak English as their first language." She said the college had terminated its contract with NTD and was trying to recruit a new Turkish trainer.*

Read more: <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/woman-on-hunger-strike-over-training-colleges-practices-20160126-gmee2s.html#ixzz3yULcB4lz>

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