***STUDENTS ARE WORKERS AND NEED A UNION TOO***

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**A pamphlet from the Industrial Workers of the World**

**Paying to be an apprentice**

Being a student means building the knowledge and skills you need to enter the workforce in the future, yet it is the only kind of job which is presented as a privilege, and which comes at a cost. Students attend classes, research, write papers, and take part in student activities. If they are lucky, students can access an education for free, but are still expected to work to cover their living expenses or get into debt. If they are unlucky, which is increasingly becoming the case, they are expected to pay to gain the skills that will benefit their future employer.

While students are expected to pay to gain the knowledge and skills they need, or do it for free, trade workers take on paid apprenticeships to do the same thing. How did we get to this stage where the work those studying for a trade is seen as worthy of compensation, and the work done by students is seen as a privilege?

**The lie of manual and skilled labour**

The onset of industrialisation and factory work saw the division of workers into two types. This division, known as a Taylorism, separated those who would design the way work would be done in a factory, from those who would do the work itself. Work planners were seen as scientists breaking down tasks to maximise productivity and output. Those doing the work were seen as easily replaceable low skilled machines.

The division of labour we have today is significantly more complex than what it was at the onset of industrialisation, but its objective remains the same. Create a hierarchy between workers to maximise output. Workers who undertake manual labour are presented as “unskilled” and the work they do as undesirable even though it has critical social value. This justifies poverty wages, racism, and criminalisation of a “lower class”.

“Skilled labour”, on the other hand, is presented as “better”, even though most of it is reducible to glorified excel work. This hierarchy is used to present studying as a privilege worth paying for. It is also recreated in universities where lecturers are meant to be experts and students as the faithful followers who have no say in what or how they are taught.

**Where are the student unions?**

Just like labour unions, student unions were meant to break that hierarchy and give students negotiating power over the curriculum and how university resources are spent. Instead, student unions have become beholden to universities who control their income, limit their scope, and channel attempts at real change into bureaucratic processes skewed in favour of university management.

Student unions are now seen as nothing more than service providers organising social events, running bars with cheap alcohol, and enhancing the “student experience”. Meanwhile, fundamental problems caused by university management such as increased tuition fees, less contact time, and worsening mental health get little attention.

Problems faced by students are similar to those lecturers need to deal with. Pay and pension cuts, increased workloads and casualization, and widespread depression has seen poor working conditions directly translate into a poorer quality of education.

University lecturers and staff have gone on strike to fight against these conditions, but universities have used these strikes to divide students against their lecturers claiming that if lecturers cared about their students they wouldn’t go on strike.

**Refuse to be divided**

Many students have seen through this lie. Students have independently organised sit in, occupations, and protests in support of their lecturers. Despite the common struggles faced by students, lecturers, and other university staff, student unions are still seen as something separate from lecturer and staff unions. This has allowed university management to continue playing divide and conquer.

The **Industrial Workers of the World (IWW),** however,wants to break this divide. We organise all workers employed by a university including students into independent and democratic committees. These committees use **direct democracy and direct action** to identify common issues and find ways that to fight back together.

We believe that knowledge is a social good and should be freely and readily accessible and available to all. We believe that those engaged in educational work, i.e. teachers and learners, should be determining what is being taught and how. This can only be achieved once gatekeeping under market relations is abolished.

Qr code

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