

Tuesday, 17 August 2010

Universities could again be at the frontline of Liberals' industrial relations agenda, warn unions

Australia's universities should never again be used as a testing ground for a radical Liberal workplace agenda, say unions.

Unions are determined to prevent a repeat of the abuse of Commonwealth funding by the Coalition to pursue individual contracts in the tertiary education sector.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said unions were concerned that a Coalition Government could seek to blackmail universities into using individual contracts with the threat of withholding funding. Mr Lawrence said the last time the Coalition was in power, it used Commonwealth funding to drive an extremist industrial relations agenda in the tertiary sector.

Mr Lawrence will today address a stopwork meeting by University of Queensland academic and general staff who are seeking a new collective agreement.

Staff are today beginning a series of rolling stoppages in pursuit of an improved pay offer from the university, which had a surplus of \$128 million in 2009. Average pay for senior lecturers and for general staff at the University of Queensland are the second lowest of 17 tertiary institutions, despite the university's status as one of Australia's Group of Eight.

"Staff are using the Fair Work Act to attempt to claw back pay they lost under the Coalition Government," Mr Lawrence said.

"After refusing to meet with staff and their union for many months, the university began negotiations last year shortly before the Fair Work Act began operation. The Act encourages collective bargaining which is the best way to secure good pay and conditions for workers.

"This is in contrast with the last Coalition Government's Higher Education Workplace Relations Requirements, which made increased funding for universities conditional on institutions rolling out Australian Workplace Agreements to their staff.

"Tony Abbott wants to reintroduce individual contracts in Australian workplaces. He has also failed to rule out again using Government funding to implement his radical IR agenda."

Last decade, \$458 million of Commonwealth funding to universities was subject to the HEWRRs. The Coalition also used its funding powers to drive its IR agenda in other industries, including tender processes for government-funded construction projects.

MEDIA ALERT

1pm, Tuesday, 17 August 2010

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence addresses stopwork rally at University of Queensland.

Michie Ampitheatre, Chancellor Place, St Lucia.

Media contacts:

Mark Phillips 0422 009 011 or Amanda Nguyen 0418 479 455