

In Lieu of an Introduction: A Proposal to Improve the Prospects of Arts Graduates in Australia, and for Making them Beneficial to the Publick

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It is a melancholy object to those, who walk through Sydney or Melbourne, or travel in the regional towns such as Brisbane or Perth, when they see the cafés, the op-shops and the university campuses crowded with Arts graduates, all in rags, and importuning every passer-by for a job. These young women and often men, instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in scrolling and begging sustenance from their helpless parents, who either mortgage their Harbourside mansions for their children's want of work, leave their dear native state to reside in the Sunshine Coast, or, for want of sufficient capital, force their children into the shameful employ of the public sector.

I think it is agreed by all parties, that this prodigious number of Humanities graduates in the arms, or on the backs, or at the heels of their fathers, and frequently of their mothers, is in the present deplorable state of the federation, a very great fiscal emergency; and therefore whoever could find out a fair, cheap and easy method of



making these graduates sound and useful members of the Commonwealth, would deserve so well of the public, as to warrant an OAM for being a preserver of the nation.

But my intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the children of property developers and corporate lawyers: it is of a much greater extent, and shall take in the

whole number of students at a certain age, who are born of parents bereft even of six-figure salaries, and in effect as little able to support Arts graduates as those who demand our charity in the streets.

As to my own part, having turned my thoughts for several years upon this important subject, and severely weighed the schemes of professional development advisors and university public relations officers, I have always found them grossly mistaken in their calculations. It is true, a sociologist, just graduated from her discipline, may be supported by employment in a government department, with little need for more direct welfare funding; even an historian may find an internship at a public institution which, supplemented with work in some kind of shop, could keep them from begging; but it is exactly at the point of graduating from secondary school that I propose to provide for them in such a manner, as, instead of being a charge upon their parents, or the taxpayer, or wanting government-funded employment for the rest of their lives, they shall, on the contrary, contribute to the feeding, and the clothing of thousands of hard-working Australians.

There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent the poor enrolling in creative writing degrees in the first place, and that horrid practice of mediocre students, unsure of what they wish to study, enrolling in psychology, alas! too frequent among us, sacrificing their prospects, I doubt, more to avoid

the shame of not going to university than the desire to read Jung, which would move tears and pity in the most savage and inhuman psychoanalyst.

The number of taxpayers in this country being usually reckoned thirteen million, of these I calculate there may be about fifteen thousand whose children are sufficiently provided for to study abroad at an Ivy League or Russell Group institution; of this number I expect a fifth may undertake a Bachelor of Arts, (although I apprehend there cannot be so many, under the present conditions of Australian schooling, who could meet the requirements for entry) but this being granted, there will remain seventy-three thousand hopeful Arts degree applicants unable to read the Classics at Oxford, Yale, or some equivalent. I subtract eleven thousand, for those students who abandon their studies, or who, due to illness or injury, leave university between matriculation and graduation. There remain some sixty-two thousand children of poor parents graduating with a Bachelor of Arts each year. The question therefore is, how this number shall be reared, and provided for? Which, as I have already said, under the present situation of affairs, is utterly impossible by all the methods hitherto proposed. For we can neither employ them in law or medicine; they neither operate mining equipment, (I mean in the country) nor build apartment complexes: they can very seldom pick up a livelihood by stealing unless it be by means of welfare fraud; except where they are women of

towardly parts, and can find some man of respectable means from which to derive their daily sustenance; during which time they can however be properly looked upon only as housewives of the most ungainly sort: As I have been informed by a principal gentleman in the suburb of Toorak, who protested to me, that he never knew above one or two instances of an Arts graduate who was both attractive and willing to cook for him, even in a city so renowned for its food culture.

I am assured by our employment agencies, that an Arts graduate before several years of industry experience, is no saleable commodity, and even with postgraduate qualifications, they will not yield above seventy thousand dollars, or eighty thousand at most, in the private sector; which cannot turn to account either to the parents or the state, with rents in respectable parts of Sydney being three-quarters of that value.

I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

I have been assured by a very knowing private prison administrator of my acquaintance in Tennessee, that an uneducated, but otherwise healthy, young, black man, is, at eighteen years old, a most effective labourer, particularly when kept in confinement. For the most meagre of wages, such indentured labour produces all manner of American manufactured goods, whether it be processed food, computer parts, furniture, or women's undergarments; and I

make no doubt that Arts students could be similarly employed.

I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration, that of the sixty-two thousand prospective Arts students, already computed, one hundred be offered government scholarships to prestigious international universities, whereof only one fourth part to be women; which is more than we allow female members of the parliamentary Liberal party and my reason is, that these women are traditionally able to secure their living through marriage, even given consideration of their domestic shortcomings. That the remaining prospective Arts students may, at the conclusion of secondary school, be offered positions in Australian institutions, majoring in physical labour, always advising schools to advance the sporting prowess of their charges at the expense of academic achievement, so as to render them lithe, and fit for their tertiary studies. Students will benefit the State, and will provide for their own food and clothing, and in the event of war, will have already produced their necessary armaments, uniforms and equipment, a veritable boon, given this workforce should be subject to conscription.

I have reckoned upon a medium, that a student upon finishing their senior schooling, working in confinement for a solar year, if tolerably fed, can produce the same as an indentured south-east Asian textile worker.

I grant this work will be somewhat shoddy, and therefore very proper for foreigners, who,

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given their recent importance in supporting the university system in this country, seem to have the best title to the output of domestic students.

Student labour will be available throughout the year, but for a time will be more plentiful in March, and a little before and after; for we are told by a grave author, an eminent head of the Humanities, that reading being abhorrent to the poor, there are more students in the opening stages of classes than about nine weeks into semester, but the market will nevertheless even out, because once students are made aware that reading is not advised under the curriculum, they will no longer have reason to abandon their studies, and therefore it will have one other collateral advantage, by lessening the rate of literacy among the working class.

I have already computed the charge of such an education for a beggar's child (in which list I reckon all tradesmen, labourers, and four-fifths of the solicitors) to be about five thousand dollars per annum, rags included; and I believe no government would repine to pay such a sum for a year's worth of labour from someone raised in the developed world, who, as I have said, will be

trained from childhood to work for the benefit of private businesses, when he hath the opportunity to at once support Australian industry, and the Australian education system. Thus the industrialists will abandon unethical business practices, the parents will be rid of layabout adolescents, the students will have food and board, and receive a tertiary degree at the summation of their labours.

Those who are more conscientious (as I must confess the times require) may stay on for postgraduate studies; the nature of which, given years of experience, would produce goods of altogether superior quality. They may even wish to pursue a teaching career, assisting with the education of further Arts graduates majoring in physical labour.

As to whether campuses should be located in our Cities of Sydney and Melbourne, the regions may be appointed for this purpose, in the least convenient parts of them, and lecturers we may be assured will not be wanting; although I rather recommend accommodation be confined to camps, and fencing students in, as we do for the refugees.

A very worthy person, a true lover of his country, and whose virtues I highly esteem, was lately pleased, in discoursing on this matter, to offer a refinement upon my scheme. He said, that many gentlemen of his country, having of late stemmed the flow of undocumented labour into his homeland, conceived that the want of human capital might be well supply'd by the bodies of young lads and maidens, not exceeding sixteen years of age, nor under ten; so great the need for cheap labour in that country and want of cleaners and cooks: And these to be disposed to such menial tasks, or otherwise the service of their betters. But with due deference to so excellent a friend, and so deserving a patriot, I cannot be altogether in his sentiments; for as to these children, my American acquaintance should be well aware from historical experience, that in the absence of preparatory inculcation, provided to our school-children by years of ideological subordination, these prospective workers would soon grow disagreeable, and the expense of discipline would not answer the charge. And besides, it is not improbable that some scrupulous people might be apt to once again censure such a practice, (although indeed very unjustly) as a little bordering upon cruelty, which, I confess, hath always been with me the strongest objection against any project, how well soever intended.

But in order to justify my friend, he confessed, that this expedient was put into his head by a famous clothing manufacturer, a person of

Sweden, who brought his business thence to New York, about twenty years ago, and in conversation told my friend, that in his industry, when any young labourers were sought, the employer simply moved production overseas; and that, in his time, it was not unusual for such young workers to exist in a perpetual daze from exposure to poisons, malnutrition, or sheer exhaustion. Neither indeed can I deny, that if the same use were made of environmental conditions in this country, so that malcontents cannot stir dissent among their peers, and remain at their stations in solemn assembly without additional pay; the federation would not be the worse.

Some persons of a desponding spirit are in great concern about that small number of aboriginal youths, who are poor, disempowered, or uneducated; and I have been desired to employ my thoughts what course may be taken, to similarly ease the nation of so grievous an incumbrance. But I am not in the least pain upon that matter, because it is very well known, that they are every day dying by alcohol and substance abuse, rotting in gaol and detention, as fast as can be reasonably expected. And as to the young aborigines, they are now to be in an almost hopeful condition. They cannot get work, but will henceforth not be in want of nourishment, or qualifications, now to be obtained through physical labour, and thus the country and themselves are happily delivered from the evils of their culture.

I have too long digressed, and therefore shall

return to my subject. I think the advantages by the proposal which I have made are obvious and many, as well as of the highest importance.

For first, as I have already observed, it would serve as a disincentive to middle-class Arts graduates, with whom we are yearly over-run, being the principal breeders of revolutionary thought, and who spend their days on social media fomenting rebellion among their peers, having abandoned the cause of the working class, who have themselves fled to conservatism, from a progressive politics which holds them in contempt.

Secondly, students from poor families, or the country, will have something valuable of their own, as they are already better accustomed to thankless work, and having their concerns ignored, and thus will labour more admirably in their studies than their middle-class fellows, or those from Sydney and Melbourne.

Thirdly, whereas the provision of thousands of students with low-interest loans, paid back piecemeal by shiftless graduates, and with no profit to industry, was a blight on the national purse, with this scheme the nation's manufacturing industry will be thereby increased exponentially, besides the profit of additional employment in the education sector, and ample graduate teaching opportunities. And with this money will come new avenues for investment by our selves, the profits being entirely of our own growth and manufacture.

Fourthly, the previous generation, besides the

gain of cheap manufactured goods by the education of their children, will have rid themselves of the charge of maintaining their offspring after the completion of schooling.

Fifthly, the innovative nature of this approach to education would likewise bring new sources of foreign direct investment, and Australian universities will certainly be so prudent as to establish campuses around the country; and consequently have their programs associated with all the finest multinational corporations, who justly value themselves upon their ability to source cheap human capital; and a considerate manufacturer, who understands how to oblige his customers, will contrive to make production as inexpensive as they please.

Sixthly, this would be a great disincentive to education, which all wise nations have either discouraged by threats, or undermined by restructuring and defunding. It would improve the government's disposition towards universities, end precarity in the sector, provide real benefit to the publick, and generate annual profit instead of expence. We should soon see an honest competition among institutions, which of them could establish the largest Arts department. Professors would become as fond of their students, during the semester, as they are now of their publication records, their academic memberships, or their Australian Research Council grants; nor attempt to harass or sexually assault them (as is too frequent a practice) for fear of a drop in productivity.

Many other advantages might be enumerated. For instance, the addition of some hundreds of thousands of dollars to the gross domestic product: the promotion of obedience among the young, and a general improvement to the quality of life in the cities, so much wanted among us in response to gatherings of youths, too frequent in our streets; which would surely curb criminality and less savoury forms of publick entertainment. But this, and many others, I omit, being studious of brevity.

Supposing that as few as thirty thousand students took up this offer of food, lodgings and gainful employment, besides the volume of unemployed currently looking for work, who might be offered government scholarships to enrol in a Bachelor of Arts, I compute that the result would be well over an hundred million hours of productive effort per annum; and the profits to be made here (despite the admittedly second-rate nature of their goods) will surely rival those created by my acquaintance from the American prison system.

I can think of no one objection, that will possibly be raised against this proposal, unless it should be urged, that cultural production will be thereby much lessened in the federation. This I freely own, and 'twas indeed one principal design in offering it to the world. I desire the reader will observe, that I calculate my remedy for this one individual culture of Australia, and for no other that ever was, is, or, I think, ever can be upon Earth. Therefore let no man talk to me of other

expedients: Of providing an education to the disadvantaged: Of undertaking world-class Humanities research in this country: Of utterly rejecting the notion that the academy exists for the sole purpose of vocational training: Of curing a financial reliance on international students: Of fostering a vein of curiosity, inquiry and scepticism in the Humanities: Of learning to appreciate our universities, wherein we differ even from Americans, and the inhabitants of Aotearoa: Of quitting the animosities and factions within departments, nor attacking one another at the very moment solidarity is needed most: Of being a little cautious not to sell our consciences for nothing: Of teaching students to at least entertain ideas they disagree with. Lastly, of putting a spirit of honesty, industry, and rigor into our students, who, if a resolution could now be taken to educate and empower, would immediately unite to exact upon us a bitter vengeance for the discrepancies between our education and theirs.

Therefore I repeat, let no man talk to me of these and the like expedients, 'till he hath at least some glympse of hope, that there will ever be some hearty and sincere attempt to put them into practice.

But, as to my self, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal, which, as it is wholly new, so it hath something solid and real, of no expence and little trouble,

full in our own power, and whereby we can incur no danger in disobliging Australia. For this kind of education will revitalise the manufacturing industry of this country, and labour being largely confined to national borders, due to continuance of plague, although perhaps I could name a country, which would be glad to employ our whole nation in this scheme without it.

After all, I am not so violently bent upon my own opinion, as to reject any offer, proposed by wise men, which shall be found equally innocent, cheap, easy, and effectual. But before something of that kind shall be advanced in contradiction to my scheme, and offering a better, I desire the author or authors will be pleased maturely to consider two points. First, as things now stand, how they will be able to find gainful employment for eleven thousand unemployed university staff in addition to a far greater number of unemployed casual academics and tutors, whose whole subsistence spans from hand to mouth, from one semester to the next. And secondly, how they propose to employ a generation of graduates, left to rot, with their partners and children, who are beggars in effect; I desire those politicians who dislike my overture, and may perhaps be so bold to attempt an answer, that they will first ask, whether destitute postgraduates would not at this day think it a great happiness to reliably work for mere food and lodging, and thereby have avoided the waste of their time and

minds, furthering the national store of knowledge, for a government that despises them, and an academy that has abandoned its duties to the public. As it stands, expertise neither houses nor cloaths them from the inclemencies of the economic climate, and the most inevitable prospect of educating the poor is heaping greater miseries upon their head for ever.

I profess, in the sincerity of my heart, that I have not the least personal interest in endeavouring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the publick good of my country, by advancing our education sector, providing goods for the populace, jobs for the poor, and investment opportunities for the rich. I have no interest in the Arts, by which I can propose to get a single penny; last read a novel when I was nine years old, and my bachelor's degree was in law and governance.

Image: "[Gulliver and the Liliputans, trade card](#)" (CC BY 2.0) by [trialsanderrors](#)