War clouds gather over Institute

By LEONIE BIDDLE

A memo by the institute's staff association chairman, Mr John Krajsek, on Thursday, dissociated the association from statements by the committee this week.

Mr Krajsek said the association was still prepared to have a representative on the tactics committee if it was "truly representative and not just a group of individuals," namely the FCA.

Signs the academics' campaign was losing ground became evident, earlier in the week.

These followed claims by the FCA of government members putting pressure on institute lecturers to "bend the rules" for particular students.

Asked to back up the claims with specific examples, Mr Boulter, as intervention on a failed student.

But events since have shown the FCA should have been let that horns' nest well alone.

"Mr Harris...surprised"

While the academics were talking about removing discussion from the public arena and cooling-off periods, Mr Harris fired back with allegations which also include the student had been threatened in a letter from Education Studies department head, Dr David Ingram.

Dr Ingram yesterday described the Minister's statements as a "gross distortion of the facts."

Special

He said the institute had "shifted back" to a full student, under the regulations, should have had her enrolment terminated for 12 months for twice failing a unit of her course.

"We arranged a special program, including individual tuition, which allowed her to complete her course at the end of 1984," Dr Ingram said.

If the regulations had been carried through the student would not have been able to complete requirements until May, 1986, he said.

But Mr Harris remains confident evidence before him will clearly show the student was unfairly treated and the sorry affair will be publicly revealed in the Assembly.

Dr Ingram is equally certain he has the necessary evidence to show the student was rightly failed and the institute went out of the way to help her complete the last requirement of her course as soon as possible.

Vocal

There is also the question of who is paying for the hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on behalf of the Federation of College Academics (NT) using the institute's telex.

Statements of concern issued from all sectors of staff and students over the Chief Minister, Mr Ian Tuxworth's, high-handed appointment of Institute Director, Mr Kevin Davis.

The FCA was particularly vocal about Mr Davis's lack of academic qualifications, minimal when compared with his counterparts in other states.

Mr Davis was considerably less qualified than many of the academics under his charge which also is a bitter pill for them to swallow.

Assault

The unilateral renaming of the institute by Mr Tuxworth also is greatly resented.

It appears one of the most surprised individuals at the time was Education Minister, Mr Tom Harris.

Mr Harris was under fire last week as the counter-assault, led by the FCA, moved into full swing.

Academic status is at the heart of the dispute and the FCA, led by Trevor James, feel this has been greatly undermined by the Government.

Rising is a pecking order in higher education which places universities at the top, institutes of technology and colleges of advanced education next and TAFE (technical and further education) colleges last.

Members of the FCA believe, at least, they are the equal of their counterparts in other institutes of technology and colleges of advanced education.

They are highly qualified of their members see themselves as potential university lecturers and resent the sort of treatment which relegates their institutions to government department status.

To quote Dr James, such institutions shouldn't be tolerated at institutes of technology such as the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology or Queensland Institute of Technology.

"It wouldn't be tolerated or even contemplated in the first place," Dr James said during a recent interview.

And it wouldn't. Heads of these institutions are not government appointees and their qualifications are not in question.

It could be said DIDT is not in the same category as those institutions but there can be no harm in striving to be.

The concerns of Darwin academics, though written off as those of a small clique, are surely their desire for a credible institute with highly regarded degrees also must be in the interests of students and higher education in the Territory.

The campaign against Territorial Government interference intensified late last week following Dr James's announcement that national support, including the Federal Government, would be sought.

Weekend meetings were held to form a tactics committee to coordinate the campaign at Territory and national level.

The committee was to be representative of higher education comprising staff and student association members, the Northern Territory Teachers' Federation DIDT branch and the FCA.

By this means the representative committee is not so representative.

The irony in this approach is that the academics want Mr Davis out of the director's seat and he is supposed to take up the other concerns with the Government which is backing him to the hilt.