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University presidents' 'Yes' intervention is anti-intellectual and hypocritical

The People's Movement condemns last Thursday's statement by seven university heads as an unwarranted intrusion into the democratic referendum process. It amounts to an anti-intellectual and hypocritical affront to their own students, staff and the electorate as a whole.

Their Yes call is based upon the suggestion that voting against Lisbon is somehow harmful to existing EU policies which support the modernisation and expansion of the Irish higher education system.

Frank Keoghan, secretary of the People's Movement, said that: 'This claim is entirely bogus. Without Lisbon these policies will continue unaffected as the treaty has no connection whatsoever with current education policies. Significantly, the statement fails to identify any act or provision within the treaty in support of their call. As any exam student would know, the omission of evidence of research on the subject under question would result in outright failure, or a very poor mark. However', he continued, 'we can inform the presidents there are very few references in the treaty to education, in contrast to the thirty articles on defence'.

The presidents' statement will inevitably bring hierarchical and psychological pressure to bear on their staff and student communities. It represents a negation of the universities' traditional role of fostering independent thinking.

Keoghan went on to suggest that this statement 'reflects the growing influence of the commercialisation of universities and the need for university leadership to ensure such a process does not compromise the integrity of their primary role. Increasingly, businesses enjoy close links and partnerships with the research excellences of universities'. He pointed out that: 'The relationship of the Intel Corporation and NUI Maynooth is of strong relevance in the Lisbon context as its general manager, Jim O'Hara, has also made a prominent intervention into the referendum campaign. Is this a mere coincidence?', he asked, 'or does the presidents' statement arise as a result of cross-fertilisation between the perceived interests of big businesses and their relationship with universities?'

Lastly, Keoghan pointed to the contradiction between the presidents' 'Yes' call, due to their alleged concern for higher education, and their outright refusal to take a voluntary pay cut from the €273,000 they each earn annually. This refusal continues six months after the minister for education, Batt O'Keefe, requested them to take a modest cut to their huge salaries in the interests of national recovery.

The People's Movement urges both staff and students to make themselves aware of the contents of the treaty and to reject their presidents' call for 'Yes'.

[ENDS]

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