

Bond inquiry a stunt: senator

Students protest over sale

By FRAN METCALF

A SENATE inquiry into the sale of Bond University was yesterday slammed as a "dirty political stunt" by one of the inquiry members.

Senator Kim Carr (ALP, Vic) said the inquiry was merely allowing both parties in the dispute to air grievances against each other.

The inquiry was launched after a debate in the Senate over whether the Federal Government should sanction Queensland University's bid to buy privately owned Bond buildings and land.

The Senate employment, education and training references committee held an inquiry at Parliament House in Brisbane yesterday on the sale of Bond University's land and buildings to the University of Queensland.

The committee will report back to the Senate by the end of the month on the implications of selling a private university to a public institution.

Bond University students protested against the sale outside Parliament House.

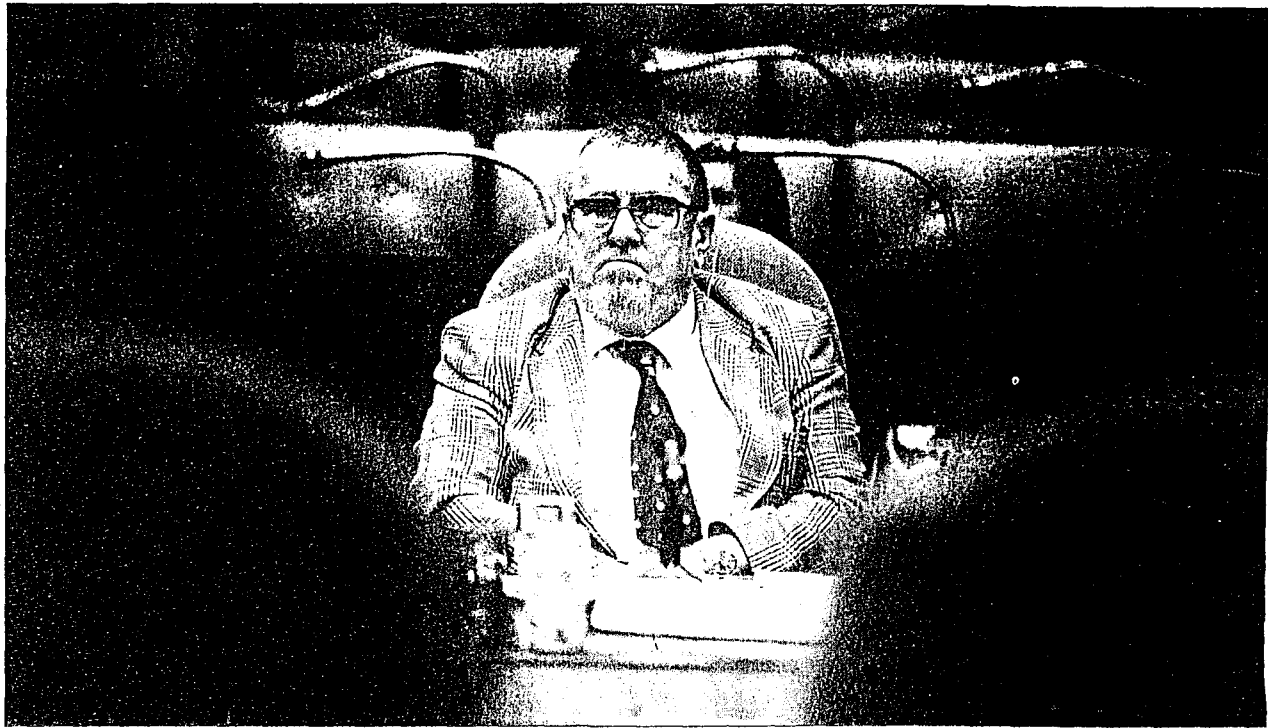
Executive chancellor Professor Harry Messel told the inquiry the university wanted to be "left alone".

"From Bond University's point of view, we prefer to own the land and buildings by ourselves (and) we were staggered when a bid came in far in excess of ours from a public institution," Professor Messel said.

Bond University Limited receivers, Long Term Credit Bank, preferred the University of Queensland's \$108 million bid despite the university's own \$86 million tender which was backed by BHP, News Ltd, ICM and Pratt Industries.

Professor Messel said it was now a case of a "mouse" negotiating with an "elephant".

"We would say, why don't you please just leave us alone and if we have to get into bed with you, please move over a bit," he said.



FACE of determination . . . Bond University chief Professor Harry Messel at yesterday's Senate inquiry.

Pictures: PHIL NORRISH

University of Queensland chancellor Sir Lew Edwards told the inquiry the sale would be the "saviour" of Bond University and would provide its students and staff with stability for the first time in its history.

"Bond University has low enrolments at the present time, increasing debt, poor morale and little leadership over recent years," Sir Lew said.

He said the University of Queensland had no intention to take control of Bond University and wanted it to continue as an independent private institution with only its land and buildings owned by the public institution.

Sir Lew said he agreed with a submission presented earlier by the Bond University Alumni Association that the sale of Bond University should be nothing more than a "glorified

land deal" with University of Queensland playing a landlord role.

Sir Lew said no public funds would be used in the purchase of Bond University's land or buildings with the university conducting private negotiations with banks.

He said claims the University of Queensland harboured ulterior motives — such as taking control and turning Bond University into a wing of a public institution or waiting for it to collapse and then building a large public university on the land — were untrue.

Bond University Limited director Malcolm Turnbull told the inquiry there was no way the University of Queensland could make the sale without using public funds or seeking an injection of private money which would put it in debt.



VOICE of support . . . Bond University students protest outside Parliament House yesterday while a Senate inquiry probes the university's sale.