

Australian university rank-and-file committees and IYSSE host forum opposing job and international student cuts

Our reporter
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On Wednesday, the rank-and-file committees at Western Sydney University (WSU) and Macquarie University, and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) jointly hosted an important forum titled: “Oppose Australian Labor government’s cuts to international students and tertiary education jobs.”

University workers, educators, students and other workers from across Australia, as well as international attendees, joined the online meeting to discuss how to fight the government’s sweeping cuts to international student enrolments, which are already triggering thousands of university job cuts.

Opening the event, Macquarie University academic and rank-and-file committee member Chris Gordon explained: “What we seek to achieve in this meeting is to deepen the fight against the attacks on education by the government, the corporate ruling class and the university managements, assisted by the complicit trade union apparatuses.”

The first speaker, Gabriela Zabala, a member of the WSU Rank-and-File Committee, outlined the connection to the committee’s fight against pro-business restructuring at WSU College, WSU’s preparatory college, which would eliminate at least 13 percent of the professional and education jobs at the College.

Zabala, who has been teaching at the College for more than 10 years, said she and other colleagues were being forced to compete against each other in a brutal “spill and fill” process, with absolutely no guarantee that any of them would even have a job in the new structure.

Students would also suffer from the elimination of courses—especially in humanities and arts—and the introduction of “block mode” teaching, cramming subjects into four-week periods.

The WSU educator explained that this attack was just one “initiative” of a six-pronged pro-corporate “Transformation Program” of WSU. That included developing “micro-credential” courses co-created with employers and targeting teaching and research partnerships with businesses with turnovers exceeding \$10 million.

Zabala said this was part of a broader pro-business

restructuring, spearheaded by the Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, of the entire higher education sector via the government’s Universities Accord.

Zabala documented intensive and anti-democratic attempts by National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) officials to block the WSU Rank-and-File Committee’s campaign against the job destruction.

“University staff and students cannot rely on the NTEU because they are complicit in it; they are attempting to ensure as smooth as possible a transition to the restructure,” by encouraging staff to apply for redundancies, Zabala explained.

Next to speak, Evrim Yazgin, national convenor of the IYSSE, explained that the struggle against university job cuts is bound up with the fight to defend the education of university students.

He centred his remarks on the IYSSE and rank-and-file committees’ opposition to the moves by the Labor government, working in tandem with the Liberal-National Coalition and corporate media establishment, to demonise international students and blame them for the mounting social and housing crisis.

International students were seen as cash cows by the universities, Yazgin explained. Thus, the cuts to tens of thousands of international student enrolments would see university managements further attack jobs, and teaching and learning conditions.

He reported that this was already underway, including at the University of Melbourne where acting vice-chancellor Nicola Phillips said the proposed international student cap would force the university to “tighten our belts,” especially through a job freeze and employment contract terminations.

Yazgin said this was part of a broader anti-immigrant campaign in Australia and internationally aimed at dividing the working class along national lines, in line with the nationalism and anti-democratic turn by governments in a period of imperialist war.

The final speaker Mike Head, a WSU academic and member of the rank-and-file committee, pointed to the Labor government’s support for Israel’s genocidal assault against

Gaza, the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and US-led preparations for war against China in this region.

“The anti-foreigner policy directed against international students is intended to help whip up a war-related atmosphere. This is not an exaggeration,” Head noted. “Chinese students are being targeted in particular, amid a growing anti-China witch-hunt by the political and media establishment, including against any university research or contacts with Chinese academics or post-graduate students.”

Head said the enrolment cuts were also designed to intensify the pressure on the chronically-underfunded universities to meet the requirements of the Albanese government’s war-related Universities Accord blueprint.

“The Accord essentially means tying enrolments, as well as research funding, to the vocational demands of employers and the building of a war economy. Funding is to be tied to individual university ‘mission statements’ to satisfy this agenda, which includes military preparations such as the AUKUS nuclear submarines and weapons program, for a US-led war against China.”

It was no accident that courses such as English, arts, history and philosophy were being decimated at WSU College and elsewhere. “The corporate elite does not want informed and articulate working-class students who can think critically. It only wants them for industry exploitation.”

Head explained that the complicity of the NTEU and other unions in the government and corporate offensive highlighted the need for new organs of struggle, uniting university workers, educators and students.

“We need to form rank-and-file committees throughout the education system, totally independent of the union apparatuses, to defend jobs and conditions and oppose Labor’s reactionary agenda,” Head said.

After the reports, there was a lively discussion. One attendee asked about the development and linking of rank-and-file committees in other industries and sectors.

In response, the speakers emphasised that this was essential. They explained that the *World Socialist Web Site* and Socialist Equality Parties—as part of the world Trotskyist movement—have initiated the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to develop a network of rank-and-file committees, not just throughout all industries, but across national borders.

A resolution was moved and unanimously approved by the meeting. It stated:

- This forum calls for a unified campaign by educators and students, and workers and youth more broadly, to fight the Albanese government’s cuts to international student enrolments and the thousands of job cuts they are triggering across the tertiary education sector.

- Both Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition are engaged in reactionary nationalism. They are trying to blame international students, like refugees and immigrants, for the

worsening housing and cost-of-living crisis, and deteriorating living conditions affecting millions of working-class households.

- We oppose this poisonous xenophobia, which also feeds war-mongering, and defend the basic rights of workers and young people to live, work and study wherever they choose. This is essential to forge an international movement against war and austerity and the underlying capitalist profit system itself.

- We call for a nation-wide campaign to defeat management’s plan to totally restructure Western Sydney University (WSU) College. This is part of a wider pro-business transformation of WSU and the entire tertiary education sector, along the lines of the Labor government’s Universities Accord.

- We condemn the NTEU for seeking to block the rank-and-file campaign throughout WSU and other universities for a broader fight to defeat the WSU College restructuring and job cuts.

- Taking a stand for quality education, the defence of jobs and conditions and against the war drive means rejecting the dictates of management, governments and the corporate elite, as well as those of the union officials who enforce their demands.

- We therefore urge the formation of rank-and-file committees throughout the education system, totally independent of the trade union apparatuses, to defend jobs and conditions and oppose Labor’s reactionary agenda.

This resolution needs to be widely circulated to lay the basis for a unified struggle by educators and students against the global capitalist agenda of war, austerity and the corporatisation and militarisation of education.

If you agree with this call, please contact the Committee for Public Education, the educators’ rank-and-file network, to discuss how to form rank-and-file committees and obtain help to do so:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

Twitter: [@CFPE_Australia](https://twitter.com/CFPE_Australia)



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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