

Labor's cuts set to destroy over 1,000 jobs at Australian universities

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More than 1,000 job cuts have been announced this month at public universities across Australia. This is a direct result of the Labor government's caps on international student enrolments, on top of its systemic under-funding of the universities.

Labor has decreed cuts to international student enrolments by more than 50,000 for next year, most heavily affecting 15 of the publicly-funded universities. This is a reactionary nationalist move, backed by the Liberal-National Coalition, to scapegoat international students for the worsening housing and cost-of-living crisis affecting working-class households.

The cuts are particularly hitting universities with large numbers of Chinese students, such as the University of Sydney and University of Melbourne. That is in line with efforts throughout the media and political establishment to whip up anti-Chinese sentiment amid escalating US-led preparations for war against China.

The cuts to international students are aimed at forcing universities to integrate themselves more fully with the demands of big business and the military, as set out in the Albanese government's Universities Accord.

The cuts are depriving universities of one of their main sources of income, full fee-paying international students, who have become cash cows for the universities amid funding cuts by successive Labor and Liberal-National governments.

Among the job cuts unveiled or foreshadowed so far:

•The University of Wollongong announced a \$35 million drop in revenue and cuts "in every part of the university." National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) branch president Fiona Probyn-Rapsey predicted 200-300 job cuts, and said workers would only find out if they were among them on December 20, the last day of work before the summer shut down.

•The Australian National University (ANU) unveiled a projected budget deficit of \$200 million this year, called

for a \$100 million cut from salaries. It has announced 108 redundancies so far, including 50 in the College of Health Medicine, with another 600 job cuts threatened.

•The University of Canberra (UC) said it would cut \$50 million in wages by the end of next year, or at least 200 jobs. Outgoing Vice-Chancellor Stephen Parker said the cuts would affect "all levels of the institution."

•James Cook University in Townsville said it would reduce its headcount by about 50 workers.

•The University of Southern Queensland will cut an estimated 60 jobs to fill a \$32 million budget hole.

•The University of Newcastle released a "Business Improvement Program" that states the "need to review our approach to workforce planning."

•University of Sydney Vice Chancellor Mark Scott said the university expected to lose \$1 billion in revenue over five years and has implemented a hiring freeze affecting thousands of workers on fixed term or casual contracts who will not have their contracts renewed.

The Universities of Melbourne, Federation, Tasmania and La Trobe have implemented similar measures.

This is on top of the cuts already announced at Western Sydney University's College of some 17 percent of the workforce, and the equivalent of 97 full-time positions from the Faculty of Arts at Macquarie University. At both universities, workers have formed rank-and-file committees, independent of the campus trade unions, to fight these cuts and develop a broader struggle of education workers.

Not accidentally, the main target at both Western Sydney and Macquarie is the arts and humanities courses. The ruling elite does not want critical and educated working-class students but fodder for industry or war. This points to the underlying agenda behind the cuts.

As the rank-and-file committees have warned, far from providing a vehicle to improve education, as the campus unions falsely claim, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's

Labor government is spearheading pro-market restructuring, particularly in relation to the corporate elite and the military.

The government's Universities Accord report, released in February, calls for courses to be designed "with the skill needs of industry in mind," making special mention of the \$368 billion "AUKUS nuclear submarine program," which is bound up with the preparations for war against China.

While starving universities of funds, the Labor government is spending billions on supporting the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine, the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza, and preparations for war against China, including the construction of US military bases across the north and west coast.

The restructuring is coupled with a crackdown on dissent on campuses. Earlier this month, police arrested three Western Sydney University students for conducting a peaceful protest against the genocide in Gaza and bombing of Lebanon.

In July, the University of Sydney management imposed a "Campus Access Policy" that all but prohibits protests. While inflicted in response to anti-genocide student encampments, such measures setting anti-democratic precedents for use more broadly against youth and workers opposing the government's pro-war agenda.

The NTEU and the other main campus trade union, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), are fully complicit in Labor's assault. In September the NTEU asked its members to sign a petition to the government calling for a "phase-in periods for any caps" on international students, not the reversal of them.

The NTEU falsely claims that the enrolment cuts could be implemented without any job losses and that vice chancellors' warnings about thousands of job cuts were just "scare mongering."

Likewise, responding to the latest cuts at ANU and UC, NTEU Australian Capital Territory division secretary Lachlan Clohesy said "really poor [university] governance is at the root of all these problems." He called on Education Minister Jason Clare to "implement a transition plan to make up funding shortfalls due to federal government policy changes."

This was as though it was not the Labor government itself that has authored the cuts.

This represents a deepening of the role of the union apparatuses in diverting political opposition away from the Labor Party. The unions campaigned for and supported the previous Rudd-Gillard Labor governments

of 2007 to 2013, which cut university funding by \$10 billion, and implemented policies that forced universities to compete for enrolments.

The response of the unions to this latest offensive underscores the necessity for university staff to form independent rank-and-file committees as the only means to take forward their opposition to the attack on public education.

At a public online forum organised by the rank-and-file committees at Western Sydney and Macquarie universities, and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), an important resolution was passed opposing Labor's cuts to international students, condemning the complicity of the unions, and calling on workers to take matters into their own hands by forming rank-and-file committees in their workplaces.

The resolution called 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."

The rank-and-file committee at Western Sydney University (WSU) has also condemned the student arrests at that university and endorsed a resolution adopted overwhelmingly by a general meeting of students at WSU, convened by the IYSSE, calling for a socialist strategy, based on a campaign throughout the working class, to fight the Israeli genocide in Gaza and the plunge into US-led imperialist war.

To join tomorrow's next meeting of the WSU Rank-and-File Committee, please contact the committee at: rfc.wsu@gmail.com.

If you agree with these resolutions, please contact the Committee for Public Education, the educators' rank-and-file network, to discuss how to join or form rank-and-file committees and obtain help to do so:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

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