

Build rank-and-file committees at Australian universities to fight cuts, victimisations and war drive!

Committee for Public Education
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Tertiary education staff and students in Australia, together with their counterparts internationally, confront a serious attack on jobs and free speech as the 2025 academic year begins.

Despite outrage and opposition, university management is pushing ahead with over 2,000 job cuts, especially in the humanities and arts. This includes up to 650 jobs at Australian National University (ANU), 200 at the University of Canberra, up to 500 at the University of Technology Sydney and at least 150 at the University of Wollongong.

Job cuts are also threatened at the following universities: Federation, James Cook, Southern Queensland, Griffith, La Trobe, Tasmania and Swinburne. Hiring freezes have been imposed at the universities of Sydney, Melbourne and Newcastle, and wider cost-cutting is being unveiled, including at Macquarie and Western Sydney.

This is a direct result of the Albanese government's reactionary cuts to Chinese and other international student enrolments, on top of Labor's deepening of the decades-long chronic under-funding of tertiary education. Acting in concert with the Liberal-National Coalition, the Labor government is slashing enrolments by up to 50,000 a year, through an arbitrary Ministerial Directive to impose individual university caps.

Under these conditions, a historic assault is also underway on free speech, with the management at the University of Sydney and others moving to prohibit any form of political dissent on campus, particularly against the continuing US-backed Israeli atrocities in the Middle East, but also against the program of war and austerity being implemented by the Albanese Labor government.

At Macquarie University, Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah, a well-known sociologist and pro-Palestinian educator, has become the most prominent victim of an escalating witch hunt by the federal and state governments, corporate media and Zionist lobby groups against educators who oppose the genocide in Palestine.

Others being victimised include University of Sydney academics, John Keane and Nick Riemer, sociology professor Sujatha Fernandes and the sacked academic Tim Anderson, as well as journalists Mary Kostakidis, Peter Lalor and Antoinette Lattouf.

This is part of a wider political shift. The return of the fascistic Donald Trump to the US White House is rapidly reshaping capitalist politics globally. This is threatening humanity with

dictatorship and war in the interests of the world's richest oligarchs, personified by Elon Musk.

The Israeli genocide in Gaza, backed by all the imperialist governments, including the Albanese government, has become a drive to totally reorganise the Middle East in the interests of the US and its allies. Trump is calling for Gaza to be "cleaned" of its Palestinian population to make way for US control.

The Albanese government has refused to so much as comment on, let alone oppose Trump's agenda. Instead, it is vying with the Liberal-National Coalition to prove itself to be the best partner for the Trump White House in its militarism, anti-immigrant witch-hunting, corporate tax cuts and gutting of social spending, including on public health, education and welfare.

No less than the Coalition, the Labor government is seeking to make international students and immigrants scapegoats for the worsening housing and cost-of-living crisis affecting millions of working-class households. As with Trump's mobilisation of the military to deport millions of immigrants, this offensive seeks to divide the working class and divert mounting discontent in poisonous nationalist directions.

While allocating hundreds of billions of dollars for AUKUS submarines and other weaponry directed against China, Labor is continuing to starve the universities of adequate funding, along with schools, hospitals, the NDIS and other social programs. The 2022 and 2023 budget papers showed that higher education expenditure would decrease by more than 9 percent in real terms from 2021–22 to 2024–25.

This financial squeeze is aimed at forcing the 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 and its chilling "military secrets" and "national security" bans and restrictions on research.

The Accord insists that universities must transform both their teaching and research in partnership with employers, and in line with the building of a war economy, including through the AUKUS pact, in preparation for a US-led war against China.

That is in line with Labor's signature policy over the past two years, which has been to complete Australia's transformation into a frontline state for such a war, including with the largest military build-up since World War II and a vast expansion of US basing.

This blueprint ties funding to universities signing "mission-

based compacts” with a new Australian Tertiary Education Commission, above all to “deliver Australia’s future skills needs.” The Accord report specified “micro-credential” courses to meet the requirements of employers, along with “work integrated learning” and “degree apprenticeships,” including AUKUS apprenticeships.

The report nominated “areas of national priority like clean energy, critical technology, minerals and defence.” All these fields are related to the geo-strategic interests of Australian imperialism and its commitment to US war plans.

This agenda is incompatible with democratic rights. It means a continuous attempt to suppress opposition to war and job destruction, as well as the shedding of all positions deemed surplus to the requirements of the military and the corporate elite.

The latest wave of job cuts is compounding the damage done by the market-driven “education revolution” implemented by the Greens-backed Rudd and Gillard Labor governments, which forced universities to rely increasingly on casual and fixed-term staff and on milking full-fee paying international students.

Opposition exists throughout the universities to the job destruction, course closures, pro-corporate restructuring and suppression of dissent. But the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) leaders have for years opposed any unified fight by university staff and students.

Union representatives have repeatedly blocked our rank-and-file calls for such unified action, including during the opening phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the unions worked with managements to enforce thousands of job cuts.

Repeatedly, the union apparatuses have pressured educators into applying for “voluntary” redundancies in line with enterprise agreement “change proposal” clauses, like the deal pushed through at Western Sydney University (WSU) College in 2022 that pledged to help the management “change its structure, operations, and priorities to meet business requirements.”

Just quitting the unions in disgust, as many have done, is not an answer. Staff and students must take matters into their own hands. For that, new democratic forms of organisation, independent rank-and-file committees (RFCs), must be built.

Like the RFCs launched at Macquarie University in 2023 and WSU in 2024, these will be forums for discussion and debate, to educate, disseminate information and organise action.

The Macquarie University RFC issued a statement on January 21 calling on academics, university workers and students at Macquarie and more broadly to come to the defence of Abdel-Fattah and other anti-genocide educators.

At WSU, the RFC is fighting the pro-business restructuring of WSU College, which is setting a sector-wide precedent by eliminating jobs via a vicious “spill and fill” process, gutting arts and humanities courses and introducing “block mode” teaching, cramming entire subjects into four-week periods.

Similar rank-and-file committees need to be formed everywhere, including to link up with workers in Australia and worldwide through the International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

RFCs can develop demands based on the needs of students and

staff, not the dictates of management, governments and the corporate elite. We propose, in outline, initial demands that include:

- halt and reverse the thousands of job cuts and the resulting skyrocketing workloads across the tertiary education sector
- stop the cuts to international student enrolments and defend the right of all students to higher education
- end the victimisation of Randa Abdel-Fattah and other academics who oppose Israel’s genocide in Gaza or the bipartisan support for US militarism
- defend genuine academic freedom and the basic democratic right to free speech
- uphold the right to conduct research that is not dictated by the demands of corporate interests, governments and the military
- secure employment for all casualised university workers who want it
- pay increases surpassing the official inflation rate to compensate for past losses
- free first-class education for all students instead of channelling billions of dollars into preparations for US-led wars

This is part of a broader necessary struggle against capitalism itself and its program of ever-greater corporate wealth and turn to war and Trump-style dictatorial rule. It means a fight to reorganise society along genuinely democratic and egalitarian, that is socialist, lines in the interests of humanity, not the corporate ruling class.

To discuss these issues and how to form RFCs, please contact the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators’ network:

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

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

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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