

# Oppose the job cuts at University of Sydney!

The International Students for Social Equality  
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The International Students for Social Equality opposes the planned destruction of hundreds of academic and professional jobs at the University of Sydney. The actions of the university administration are being driven by the Labor government's pro-market "education revolution" and signify a new stage in its implementation. The Gillard government's aim is to slash spending per student and deepen the transformation of universities from institutions of academic and intellectual achievement into profit-driven corporate concerns.

Similar redundancies are being implemented at universities across Australia, including at the University of NSW and the University of Queensland. Currently, there are 150 positions threatened at Canberra's Australian National University, while Sydney's Macquarie University has announced further departmental cuts, following last year's 70 redundancies. In 2010, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) agreed to 300 redundancies at Monash University in Melbourne, currently Australia's largest university.

The planned cuts at the University of Sydney have provoked widespread opposition among students and staff. No one should have any illusions, however, that the March 27 agreement struck between the NTEU and university management will safeguard jobs. It only postpones the deadline for the cuts, and gives the administration further time to pressure staff members into taking redundancies. NTEU branch president Michael Thomson stated last year that the union would "abide by the enterprise agreement" it had signed with the management, which allows for restructuring provided the union is consulted. One way or another, the jobs are set to be destroyed by next semester.

Governments internationally are imposing austerity measures to make the working class pay for the global financial crisis. Education is a prime target. Conditions in the US and Britain provide a warning of what is in store in Australia as the Gillard government pushes ahead with plans for a budget surplus. In the United States, state administrations are slashing education spending by upward of 20 percent, imposing massive increases onto student fees and eliminating of university places. In Britain, over 200,000 students were denied places as a result of the trebling of tuition fees last semester.

The international character of the attacks on education exposes the fraud of the NTEU's claim that the planned cuts at Sydney University are just the outcome of the greed or mismanagement of university administrators. The union is deliberately obscuring the role of the Gillard government and covering up the NTEU's collaboration with it.

Labor's "education revolution" has imposed a new funding scheme tied to the number of students that individual institutions enrol each year. This is compelling universities, long starved of adequate resources, to compete with each other to recruit students. While the overall number of students is currently being lifted, the continued underfunding means expanded class sizes, over-stretched facilities and greater reliance on casuals to teach fluctuating numbers of students.

Last year, the NTEU struck no less than 30 enterprise agreements with university administrations, each dovetailing with this agenda. These agreements facilitated the casualisation of the academic workforce to the point where casuals make up an average of 21 percent of the staff, with the rate reaching 36 percent at some institutions. Union agreements also sanctioned increased workloads for academics and cutbacks to

schools or entire faculties.

The fact that the NTEU will not wage a campaign to defend jobs was most clearly demonstrated at Macquarie University last year. During an NTEU meeting on a new agreement, Socialist Equality Party supporters demanded that staff be given the opportunity to read and debate the deal prior to voting. The NTEU leadership suppressed the SEP resolution and instead forced through an “in principle” vote of support for an unseen document. Based on that vote, the union proceeded to ratify a deal that removed restrictions on casualisation. The day after the deal was pushed through, 70 redundancies were announced.

The planned job cuts at University of Sydney include the arbitrary stipulation that academics must have at least four publications to their name over three years. Academics deemed to be “non-performing” are being pressured to take redundancies or demotions to teaching-only roles, stripping them of the conditions associated with tenure.

Thousands of students have voted in lecture halls to oppose the cuts and endorse the April 4 rally against them. One academic threatened with redundancy is Dr Bruce Gardiner, who has 20 years of experience as an English lecturer and tutor. His proposed sacking has been met with an outcry from current and former students and colleagues. Internationally, a distinguished panel of scholars has written to the vice-chancellor declaring that “many of us regard him to be the most diligent and dedicated supervisor or colleague we have ever had.”

In a parallel process, performance ranking is being imposed by the Labor government across the education system to push through restructuring and cost-cutting. The NAPLAN tests at the primary and secondary level are creating the conditions for the sacking of teachers and closure of schools, as has taken place as a result of similar regimes in the US and Britain. The preoccupation with narrow test results is also leading to a shift to “teach to the test” methods in class rooms, reducing education to learn by rote.

The pseudo-left organisations on campus—the

Socialist Alliance, Socialist Alternative and the Education Action Group created by Solidarity—play a politically insidious role by covering up for the NTEU. Like the union, they claim that the cuts are the product of mismanagement by the vice-chancellor. This serves only to blind students from recognising the scope of the struggle that is required to defend tertiary education. Everywhere education rights are being torn apart as governments from the US to Europe implement austerity measures to impose the burden of the global failure of the profit system.

Any genuine campaign to defend education involves a political struggle against the Gillard government, the unions and their pseudo-left apologists. This necessarily involves a turn to other sections of the working class under attack in Australia and internationally on the basis of a socialist perspective. The ISSE fights for a workers’ government based on socialist policies, which will guarantee the fundamental social right to a free, high quality education. All the resources to meet every social need can be provided by placing the banks and major corporations under public ownership and democratic control and organising them on the basis of socialist planning.

This is the perspective of the International Students for Social Equality. Click here to join the ISSE.



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