

Fight Labor's cuts! For a socialist perspective to defend education!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) Australia
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This statement was distributed April 17 to Australian students attending rallies called by the National Union of Students (NUS).

The Labor government's \$2.3 billion cut to university funding has ripped the mask from Prime Minister Gillard's so called "education revolution". All the phrases used by Gillard about a "national crusade," "ending inequality" and "a better education and a better future" have been exposed as sugar coating to hide her government's real agenda: cost-cutting and restructuring of education at every level.

The measures also expose the role of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), the school teachers unions and everyone else who has supported and promoted illusions in the "education revolution". There was never anything progressive about Labor's policies. Their reactionary character is embodied in the fact that the so-called Gonski reforms being made in the schools—themselves part of a right-wing, free market agenda—are being paid for by the single largest reduction in university funding since the 1996 cuts by the Liberal government of John Howard.

The Labor government's cutbacks include the transformation of the start-up scholarship of \$2,000 into a loan which students will be required to pay back, saving the government \$1.2 billion. The 10 percent discount for those who pay a portion of their HECS fees upfront will be scrapped, saving \$230 million.

The most serious attack, however, is the imposition of a 2 percent "efficiency dividend" on university spending in the year 2013-14 and a further 1.25 percent reduction in 2014-15. This will require universities to slash \$900 million from their collective budgets. There are already predictions that Sydney University will be required to slash \$44-\$55 million, while Wollongong University has predicted \$14 million in cuts and

foreshadowed further staff reductions.

The claim by Gillard that the inroads into university education are necessary to boost high school and primary education is a cynical lie. The real reason is that the Labor government bows to the dictates of the banks, mining conglomerates and major companies and has ruled out any taxation changes that would impinge on corporate profits or affect the fortunes of a wealthy minority. Even as it slashes education and protects the rich, Labor has pledged to increase military spending to finance new hardware and bases for US forces, as part of its alignment with the Obama administration's militarist "pivot" to Asia against China.

The latest funding cutbacks come on top of the efficiency savings imposed last year, following years of underfunding. Universities around the country are already sacking or casualising staff, increasing class sizes and closing down entire courses. This will now intensify. The slashing of funding is aimed at the complete corporatisation of universities into profit-driven institutions that tailor education to the requirements of business. The long-term implications were spelt out in yesterday's editorial in the *Australian Financial Review*, which demanded the deregulation of HECS fees so universities can charge vastly more for so-called high demand courses.

Labor's deepening assault on tertiary education underscores the fraudulent character of the claims by the NTEU and organisations such as Socialist Alliance, Socialist Alternative and Solidarity that the cutbacks to staff and courses were taking place because of the "neo-liberal" ideology of particular vice chancellors. At every point, they have thrown dust in the eyes of staff and students to block them from recognising what is necessary to defend education—a political struggle against the instigator of the cuts, the Gillard

government and the corporate interests it serves.

The IYSSE warns that the NTEU and its apologists will once again attempt to channel opposition into futile, isolated protests against university managements, who are only the enforcers of Labor's regressive agenda. The state governments have been lined up to play the same role, slashing public sector jobs, health or other areas to meet Gillard's demands that they provide funds to impose Gonski's reactionary, free market "reforms".

The Gonski report is not about improving education opportunity, but involves the transition toward a voucher system, where under the guise of "parental choice", families are provided a flat amount of money to enrol their children in either a public or private school. The entire "performance-ranking" model rammed through by Labor, via the NAPLAN tests, is derived from the right-wing US education "reforms" begun under President George W. Bush and being completed by Barack Obama. More and more parents will feel pressured to transfer their children to fee-paying private schools by assessments that public schools, especially those in working class areas, are "underperforming". As in the US, Britain and New Zealand, performance-ranking is a mechanism to shut down schools and to victimise and sack teachers.

Labor's assault on education is only one component of the ruling elite's response to the global economic breakdown of capitalism since 2008, which has seen governments from Greece, to Britain, to Canada and the US impose drastic austerity cuts on education and attack every other social right of the working class. The only way forward is a fight against the cause of this onslaught, the capitalist profit system itself and the governments who defend it.

The IYSSE rejects the claim of the ruling class and its political servants that there is "no money" to fund the basic social right to a free, high quality education at every level, from pre-school through to technical training or university. The crisis in society is not a lack of money or resources, but that the resources required are concentrated in the hands of a tiny financial and corporate oligarchy, who dictate all aspects of social life.

Students must draw the necessary lessons from this new stage in the far-reaching assault on the living standards of the working class internationally. Protests

alone are not enough to stop what amounts to a social counter-revolution. The entire working class must be politically mobilised against the Labor government and its trade union defenders in the fight for a workers' government and socialist policies. The banks and major corporations must be placed under public ownership and the democratic control of the working class as part of the restructuring of economic priorities on a world scale to meet social needs, not private profit.

We urge all students to join the IYSSE and fight to win other youth to this perspective.



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