

Fight Australian Labor's cuts to education! Support the Socialist Equality Party's election campaign!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE)
19 August 2013

The Labor government's \$2.5 billion cut to university funding, announced in April, is a sharp warning to students, youth, and the entire working class, of the regressive agenda that is about to be carried out by whichever party forms government following the September 7 election.

Despite the widespread hostility to the cuts among university staff and students, there has been no serious national campaign against them. Responsibility for this lies directly with the National Union of Students (NUS), and the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), which called limited protests in April and May in order to let off steam then shut down any further action.

The August 20 National Day of Action is likewise a cynical fraud. The NUS and NTEU have not called it to mount a genuine struggle against the assault on public education, but to promote the Greens as opponents of the cuts in the lead up to the federal election. Having supported the election of Labor in 2007 and 2010, the NTEU has now thrown its backing behind the Greens, spending \$1 million to support their candidates.

Students and staff should reject the NTEU's claim that the Greens will act to block further attacks on universities by the next government—Labor or Liberal. The Greens, no less than Labor, support the transformation of universities into for-profit entities subordinated to the dictates of the market. They have propped up the Labor minority government for the past three years, and voted for every one of its budgets, including the latest, which included the cuts to university funding.

The Greens openly present themselves as a party of “stability” and “fiscal responsibility.” These pledges to

big business, not their phony election promises about increasing university funding, will determine their actions in the next parliament.

Under conditions of the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s, all the establishment parties—Labor, Liberal and the Greens—have lined up behind the insistence of the corporate and financial elite that ordinary working people pay for the failure of the profit system.

At the centre of Labor's election campaign are its pledges to ensure the “national competitiveness” of the Australian economy, and to increase “productivity”—a thinly-veiled message that if elected it will carry out sweeping attacks on social spending, in line with the austerity drive underway in Europe and the United States.

The Liberal Party's agenda was detailed by shadow treasurer Joe Hockey in a speech last year, where he called for an “end to the age of entitlement”—that is, the abolition of the principle that the working class is entitled to basic social facilities—welfare, education, healthcare, aged care, etc—at government expense.

For higher education, the Labor government's “Education Revolution” means the subordination of universities to the market and corporate profit. As a result, the jobs, wages and conditions of staff are being destroyed, subjects and entire faculties abolished, and conditions for students constantly undermined.

Labor's latest attack is its 2 percent “efficiency dividend” on university spending this financial year, and a further 1.25 percent reduction in 2014–15. In practice, universities will have to slash their budgets by \$900 million. Labor is also abolishing the 10 percent discount for those who pay part of their HECS fees

upfront, and transforming the start-up scholarship of \$2,000 into a loan.

The NTEU, which covers academics and other university staff, has played the critical role in implementing this agenda. Over the past three years, it has functioned as the Labor government's industrial policeman, pushing through a series of Enterprise Bargaining Agreements at campuses across the country, including real wage cuts and attacks on conditions, including a sharp increase in the casualisation of the academic workforce.

The NTEU-sponsored 24-hour strikes at Melbourne University and Sydney University, called to coincide with the National Day of Action, are not aimed at halting management cuts to pay and conditions, but at pressuring university management to continue to utilise the union as the best means of imposing them. The NTEU has consciously sought to isolate academic staff at different campuses from each other, and promoted the lie that responsibility for the cuts at each campus lies with the "neo-liberal" ideology of individual vice-chancellors, not with the Labor government and its Greens backers.

The pseudo-left organisations on campus, Socialist Alliance, Socialist Alternative, and Solidarity, function as toadies of the NTEU, Labor and the Greens—that is, of the official establishment. These middle class layers are preoccupied with preventing any movement of students from breaking out of the straitjacket of the unions and the capitalist parliamentary parties and turning to the working class—linking the struggles facing students with those of the millions of workers facing a major assault on their jobs, wages and conditions, including car workers in Melbourne and Adelaide, and meat workers in Brisbane.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) insists that it is impossible to wage any genuine struggle in defence of public education outside of a complete break with the unions and the formation of rank-and-file committees that will unite staff and students and turn to other layers of the working class, on the basis of a political fight for a workers' government and socialist policies.

We warn that capitalism has nothing to offer workers and youth aside from mass unemployment, mounting social inequality, a turn to police state forms of rule, and the real danger of a global military conflagration.

We call on all students and youth looking for a way forward to support the election campaign of the Socialist Equality Party. In opposition to the ruling elite's program of social austerity and cuts, the SEP calls for billions of dollars to be poured into public education. We insist that high quality, free education, from kindergarten to university, is a social right for all. This requires the development of an independent political movement of the working class aimed at abolishing the capitalist system—the source of war, poverty, unemployment and the ever-escalating assault on democratic rights.

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