

Build the International Youth and Students for Social Equality!

A socialist program to fight the Coalition-Labor-Greens assault on education in Australia

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Australia)

16 March 2016

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) opposes the pro-business restructure at the University of Sydney. It is part of the latest round in a decades-long assault on education supported by the entire official political establishment—Labor, the Liberals and the Greens—aimed at transforming universities into entirely corporatized, for-profit entities.

The organizers of today's rally, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and the Sydney University Education Action Group (EAG), are seeking to cover-up this basic fact. They have called this protest to channel the widespread hostility to the university's cuts behind the very forces responsible for the gutting of higher education, above all Labor and the Greens, and to promote the illusion that such demonstrations can "pressure" the authorities to "back down."

The NTEU is explicitly preparing to support Labor and the Greens in the forthcoming elections. A lying press release by NTEU national president Jeannie Rea last September declared that Labor's education program stood in "stark contrast to the unprincipled, unfair and unsustainable higher education policies of the Coalition."

For its part, the EAG's promotional material for the event says nothing about how the cuts can be opposed, instead blandly stating that, "Staff and students should have a say in the future of our University," and that it is necessary to "fight back."

Their real perspective was summed up by Socialist Alternative, which plays a prominent role in the amorphous collective composed of various pseudo-left groups, along with representatives of the Greens and the Labor Party on campus. An article on Socialist Alternative's publication, *Red Flag* last month concluded by declaring, "Like the Liberals' attempts to deregulate higher education in 2014-15, this restructure can be stopped by mass action on

the part of students and staff."

This is an utter fraud!

The Liberal-National government of Malcolm Turnbull has not abandoned the plans to deregulate university fees. It has merely repackaged them. At the "Universities Australia" meeting held last week, Turnbull's Education Minister, Simon Birmingham made clear that the government is preparing to boost the "student contribution" to university funding, i.e. by massively raising fees. He also insisted that universities would have to become ever-more reliant on corporate funding.

Summing up the significance of his remarks, an editorial in the *Australian* declared, "a new model is emerging where universities will achieve their expressed desire for autonomy from government by funding it through industry partnerships." It went on to state that the "era of excessive state patronage of universities is coming to a close," i.e. any conception of universities as government-funded centers of learning and inquiry will become a thing of the past. Central to this program is the development of a two-tier system—with the elite sandstone universities increasingly accessible only to a wealthy minority, and working class youth forced into sub-par second-rate institutions.

Socialist Alternative's invocation of the "victory" of 2014-15 is a warning of the role the EAG is seeking to play. The Abbott Liberal-National government's budget of 2014, which included "fee deregulation," a move that would have hiked fees by tens of thousands of dollars, was met by widespread opposition from workers and young people, including students, staff and academics.

The EAG and Socialist Alternative, working hand in hand with the NTEU and the National Union of Students did everything they could to subordinate the emerging movement to the existing political set-up. At a series of rallies throughout the year, they invited prominent Labor and

Green politicians to posture as opponents of the Abbott government's cuts to education.

Organisers repeatedly prevented members of the IYSSE from speaking at the rallies, in order to block students from hearing a socialist perspective and to suppress any discussion of the fact that the Gillard Labor government, supported by the Greens, had introduced the largest-ever single-cut to university funding in 2013—a massive \$2.3 billion. Nor did they want mention made of the role of the Hawke and Keating Labor governments in the late 1980s and early 1990s in abolishing free university education and initiating the downward spiral in its funding ever since.

To divert attention from their rotten political perspective, these groups directed students to engage in protest “stunts”—including “sit-ins” at the offices of various university vice-chancellors, and noisy confrontations with Liberal Party politicians. These were aimed at presenting the assault on education as a product of the predilections of individual vice-chancellors and politicians and preventing any serious political discussion of the real causes.

The suppression of the movement that emerged in 2014, by Socialist Alternative, the EAG and other groups, cleared the way for the sweeping attacks now on the table, including the merger of the university's 10 faculties and 6 schools into 6 faculties and 3 schools and the reduction in the number of undergraduate degrees from 120 to as few as 20. The restructuring at USYD is modelled on measures carried out at the University of Melbourne in 2008, which saw 96 undergraduate degrees reduced to just six, and were followed by hundreds of job cuts. Similar measures are being prepared at the University of Western Australia, which is sacking 300 staff, and at universities across the country.

The government, along with the university authorities, is well aware that the NTEU and its pseudo-left backers will enforce the cuts. In 2013, University of Sydney management announced plans to sack 340 staff and academics. The union struck a deal which destroyed 55 jobs, introduced a host of voluntary redundancies and forced 100 academics into teaching-only positions. The NTEU, the EAG and a host of other groups proclaimed this betrayal a victory. The union has carried out similar sordid maneuvers at every campus.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) is fighting for the development of an independent, socialist movement of the working class in opposition to the assault on education, and the gutting of social spending. In response to the deepest crisis of the capitalist system since the 1930's, governments around the world are implementing sweeping austerity measures aimed at abolishing all the social gains made by the working class in past struggles. Throughout Europe and the US, this program has seen the return of depression-era conditions with mass

unemployment, widespread poverty and social misery.

As this agenda provokes mounting social struggles, the pseudo-left organisations, including Socialist Alternative, Solidarity and “left” sections of the Greens are seeking to emulate the “model” of Syriza in Greece, which came to power last year by falsely presenting itself as an opponent of austerity, only to carry out the deepest-ever cuts to social spending in Europe. The pseudo-left represents affluent sections of the upper middle-class in academia, the unions and the public sector whose interests are tied to the existing political set-up and the suppression of any struggles by the working class.

Hand in hand with the imposition of austerity, the major imperialist powers are carrying out an unprecedented program of militarism and war that threatens the outbreak of a new global conflict. In this region, Labor, the Liberals and the Greens have lined-up behind the advanced US preparations for war against China. Universities are playing a central role in ideologically justifying these criminal policies, with institutions such as the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney being established to suppress mounting anti-war sentiment and to promote a climate of nationalist militarism.

The IYSSE calls for students to turn to the working class, the only social force that can halt the drive to war and the assault on social conditions, and fight to mobilise it against the capitalist profit system, the real source of austerity and war. The working class has no interest in the private ownership of society's resources. It is the target of the assault on basic social rights, including to tertiary education, being spearheaded by the corporate elite.

In order to defend the democratic right to a free, high quality public education, students and youth must turn to the program and perspective of socialist internationalism and the fight for a workers' government, which would place the major banks and corporations under public ownership and democratic, workers' control. A socialist program would end the current squandering of hundreds of billions of dollars on the military, and instead allocate the resources required to guarantee the social rights of the working class as a whole, including to a free, high-quality education from kindergarten to tertiary level.



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