# Australia: IYSSE/CFPE meeting adopts resolution to fight university cuts

**Our correspondent**
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Students, university staff and other workers, including participants from overseas, joined an online public meeting last week to discuss and issue a call for a unified struggle of students and educators against the huge and intensifying cuts to jobs and courses since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and the Committee for Public Education (CFPE) in Australia held the meeting to call for the formation of joint rank-and-file committees of staff and students to fight the attacks at Sydney's Macquarie University and across the country.

In the latest assault at Macquarie, 90 more full-time academic positions are set to go, this time by forced retrenchments, on top of more than 350 "voluntary" redundancies of academic and professional staff already inflicted in 2020.

Carolyn Kennett, a member of the Socialist Equality Party and the CFPE, and an academic at Macquarie University, told the meeting: "The ruling class is using the pandemic as an opportunity to refashion class relations and working conditions in factories, schools and universities. The trillions of dollars handed to the corporate and wealthy elite in the course of the pandemic has to be clawed back through an accelerated exploitation of the working class internationally.

"The cuts to staffing announced at Macquarie University last month are part of this broader assault on the working class. Universities across the country have been slashing staff since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out more than a year ago."

Kennett read out a proposed resolution (found in full here), which called for staff and students to reject the framework of the "change proposal" at Macquarie, as "nothing but a vehicle for imposing further cuts to jobs and conditions through the pretence of 'consultation.'"

The motion opposed all efforts to make workers and students pay for the cuts to funding made by the Liberal-National and Labor governments over the past decade; demanded that billions of dollars be poured into education and healthcare, instead of big business and the military, and called for the formation of rank-and-file committees, completely independent of the trade unions, to join with workers in other areas and internationally who are facing similar struggles against the impact of the worsening global capitalist crisis.

Kennett explained that the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) had refused to put this resolution to a recent Macquarie staff meeting, precisely because the motion offers a way forward, based on an alternative socialist perspective that rejects the dictates of the corporate elite.

Kennett reminded the meeting that the attacks on education were initiated by Greens-backed Labor governments. "It was under the Hawke-Keating government of Labor that fees were re-introduced for both domestic and international students. The 'education revolution' of Rudd and Gillard forced universities to fight each other for students, particularly full fee-paying international students."

The second speaker, Sneha Arutla, the president of the IYSSE club at Macquarie University, brought into stark relief the money being spent on war preparations compared to the inadequate spending on the pandemic. She cited the UK government's announcement of a 40 percent increase in its nuclear weapons stockpile, and the US government's doubling of its military forces in the Indo-Pacific region, intended to threaten China.

Arutla said: "The events of the past year have brought students and young people face to face with the brutal reality of capitalism—that our social rights, and our very lives, are to be sacrificed on the altar of profit for major

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corporations and the wealth of a tiny layer of billionaires."

The IYSSE club president explained: "The job cuts at Macquarie University are not only an attack on university workers. Students are already being impacted. Face-to-face hours have been slashed ... Units and programs of study have been deleted, including in Arts and Science and Engineering. Students are facing larger class sizes, lower quality courses and fewer services and facilities."

Arutla exposed the role of the "Macquarie Socialists," a pseudo-left group formed on campus. "While the pseudo-left groups misleadingly label themselves 'socialist,' they oppose any struggle for a socialist program. Instead, they are preoccupied with keeping university workers straitjacketed within the NTEU and the pro-capitalist perspective of the trade unions, which is to tie workers to the needs of their employers."

The reports and resolution prompted a series of questions and comments on how to fight the cuts, and the role of rank-and-file committees. One student asked whether immediate legal action could be taken to freeze the cuts.

Kennett explained that management's cuts were "legal" under its Enterprise Bargaining Agreement with the NTEU. She emphasised that the union could not be relied upon, having imposed such agreements time and time again. The perspective of the SEP was to develop a broader struggle against the destruction of jobs and the quality of education for students.

Zach Diotte, the president of the IYSSE club at Western Sydney University (WSU), said the assault on education was occurring worldwide, so the fight at Macquarie had to be developed within that global context.

Evrim Yazgin, president of the IYSSE club at the University of Melbourne, expressed solidarity for the struggle at Macquarie, and support for the resolution. He stressed that the IYSSE and CFPE urged university workers to join with students, other workers, unemployed people and youth, to break completely from the unions and form rank-and-file committees.

Mike Head, a WSWS correspondent and an academic at WSU, said the NTEU was blocking a unified struggle against similar job cuts at WSU. He said the unions had straitjacketed and suppressed the struggles of workers for decades in Australia and internationally. He referenced the ongoing strike by graduate students at Columbia University in New York, who were fighting for better wages and conditions, and coming into conflict with the United Auto Workers union, which was seeking to isolate and stifle their struggle.

Diotte referred to the SEP's campaign at the Coles Smeaton Grange warehouse in southwest Sydney to oppose the shutdown of the facility and the destruction of most, if not all, the 350 jobs there. He described how the pseudo-left group Solidarity had propped up the United Workers Union, which sold out workers in their three-month fight against the company's lockout.

Following the discussion, the resolution was carried unanimously. Kobra, a Macquarie student, commented: "A lot of the things discussed in the meeting really resonated with me because as an arts and humanities student I had also felt the pressure on tutors to conduct larger tutorial classrooms, which I personally felt took away from my engagement and learning in the classroom setting.

"This past two years I have felt that there has been more of an effort to make the arts units 'employable' and 'corporate-worthy' which I think undermines the inherent value of the arts as a discipline. I think the resolutions proposed in the meeting are a great way to address some of these issues."

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