

University of Sydney cracks down on campus protests amid broader assault on opposition to Gaza genocide

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University of Sydney (USyd) management has, in the wake of the ending of the student encampment protesting Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza, unveiled a new policy which severely curtails the right to protest on campus.

The move at one of Australia's most prestigious universities is among the sharpest in a coordinated attack by the Australian Labor government, the corporate media and university managements across the country against the democratic rights of students. The aim is to suppress broader hostility in the population to genocide, militarism and the pro-war policies of the ruling elite.

Vice-chancellor of the University of Sydney Mark Scott issued a "campus access policy" on 27 June effective immediately.

Scott announced the new policy to staff in a July 4 email under the guise of "[e]nsuring our campus is vibrant, welcoming, and safe for all members of our community." With this pretense, the administration is trying to create the conditions where popular discontent cannot be expressed on campus.

The policy has been widely opposed by students and staff at USyd, and broader layers of the population who have correctly denounced it as a draconian attack on the right to protest.

While paying lip service to demonstrations as "a legitimate exercise of freedom of speech," the USyd policy outlines that such activities will be essentially outlawed.

Only staff and students will be allowed to organise protests on campus subject to a plethora of conditions. These cannot be held inside buildings.

The policy states that demonstrations must be "orderly and peaceful." It cites as examples of disorderly and not "peaceful" behaviour: interfering with safety, property damage, disruption of the university's operations and impeding the movement of people or vehicles. Those stipulations are so vague they could include almost any activity.

In a clear attempt to prevent the broadening of student movements to involve the wider population and, above all, the working class, the university's new policy mandates that members of the public outside the university will only be allowed to engage in demonstrations if they have prior approval from management.

Student demonstrations must be approved by management, with 72-hours notice, barring rapid snap actions in response to political events as well as campus developments such as university cuts.

It is forbidden to use "a megaphone or other amplifier in close proximity to a person," a provision which effectively bars any large protest.

Such ambiguous language has already been used at USyd to slander students involved in the encampment which was shut down a month ago.

Two USyd students were suspended for a month after the administration claimed that classes were "significantly disrupted" by protests in May.

The response of the middle-class organisers of the encampment at USyd, as in campus after campus around the country, has been essentially to accede to management's intimidation and demands for the protest to be shut down.

Even as the encampment was dissolved, Scott implied, without a shred of evidence, in a June 24 email that the peaceful protest represented a threat to "safety" of students and staff. He indicated that USyd management had been working closely with state police throughout the encampment.

This highlights the collaboration of the university managements with the highest levels of the state to suppress the free speech of students as part of a broader crackdown on anti-genocide protests and widespread opposition to government policies.

Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has spearheaded this malicious campaign, branding peaceful student demonstrations as "divisive" displays of "hatred" in May.

He declared that protests against the genocide of the Palestinian people “do not have a place” in society and claimed that he had never seen so much antisemitism in his lifetime.

Albanese and Labor have been among the most vocal purveyors of the lie that opposition to the actions of the Zionist regime in Israel amounts to antisemitism. This has been used to justify the unflinching support given by all the imperialist powers, including Australia, to the fascistic government of Netanyahu as it carries out its historic war crimes. According to the *Lancet* medical journal, the death toll of the Gaza genocide which began nine months ago could be 186,000 people or more.

But, according to Albanese and Scott, the corporate media, university managements around the country and the political establishment, the “violence” to be opposed is that of students protesting against this industrialised slaughter of the Palestinian people.

At another of Australia’s sandstone institutions, the University of Melbourne (UofM), the encampment was also shut down based on a rotten deal between the encampment organisers and management which commits the university to do nothing except list the arms manufacturers with which it has open deals, subject to “confidentiality” and “national security” considerations.

The UofM administration threatened 21 student protesters with disciplinary action in June—a month after the encampment was ended.

About 100 students and their supporters protested against the charges outside the university last week.

Misconduct notices were reportedly sent to students along with CCTV images of the students and tracking data showing the students’ use of the university’s Wi-Fi, used to determine the location of the individual at different times during the encampment protests.

Earlier this month, the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner confirmed that it had begun a preliminary investigation into a potential breach of the students’ privacy by the university administration, according to Nine media.

Several universities have issued disciplinary action against students involved in the protests on campuses around the country. This includes Monash, La Trobe and Deakin Universities in Melbourne and the Australian National University (ANU) in the country’s capital Canberra where at least two students have been expelled for their involvement in pro-Palestinian protests.

The coordinated campaign against protesting students has seen almost all the university encampments around the country end, with the last remaining at ANU and the University of Tasmania.

This week, the only other remaining encampment at the

University of Newcastle in regional New South Wales was shut down by management. An email was sent last Friday to all students that the encampment would have to be wound up by 5 p.m. on Monday.

By 5 p.m., almost all students had left. Campus security attempted to remove the last remaining students at about 6 a.m. the next morning, but four chained themselves to a couch and refused to leave.

The University of Newcastle administration sent letters to the remaining students threatening them with “disciplinary proceedings.”

Attacks on the democratic rights of students protesting against the Gaza genocide and the complicity of the governments and universities are taking place internationally. In Germany, the US and Canada, students have been violently arrested.

The assault on students’ right to protest is a warning.

Opposition to the militarist agenda will not be tolerated. The methods being prepared against student protesters are already being broadened as pro-Palestinian protesters are coming under attack.

Last week, it was revealed that Palestinian-Australian business owner Hash Tayeh, is under investigation for his involvement in anti-genocide protests. He is being accused of allegedly violating the state of Victoria’s Racial and Religious Tolerance Act.

The fact that the middle-class leaderships of the student encampments have worked with management to ensure the protests are shut down must be a lesson. Students, and the working class more broadly, cannot defend democratic rights, let alone end the genocide and imperialist war, through plaintive appeals to university managements and the capitalist governments they serve.

This can only be achieved through a turn to the working class, the sole force in society which can end the profit system which is behind war and the attacks on democratic rights.



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