

Staff protest job cuts at the University of Technology Sydney

Our correspondents
12 March 2025

Approximately 200 people, mostly University of Technology Sydney (UTS) staff, joined a campus rally on Wednesday to fight threatened job cuts, including a delegation of about 50 staff from the nearby University of Sydney.

UTS management wants to slash \$100 million from the budget by 2027, mostly through staff cuts. That would require that close to 600 jobs be destroyed, about 20 percent of the workforce. The rally was told that management also wants to cancel any unit of study with less than 80 students enrolled.

However, the speakers at the rally, called by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) UTS branch committee, covered up the causes of this assault, which is part of the destruction of over 2,000 jobs at Australian universities, especially in the humanities and arts.

This includes up to 650 jobs at the Australian National University (ANU), 200 at the University of Canberra, at least 150 at the University of Wollongong and many more at other universities, such as Federation, James Cook, Southern Queensland, Griffith, La Trobe, Tasmania and Swinburne.

That is a direct result of the Albanese Labor government's reactionary cuts to Chinese and other international student enrolments, on top of Labor's deepening of the decades-long chronic under-funding of tertiary education. Acting in concert with the Liberal-National Coalition, the Labor government is slashing enrolments by up to 50,000 a year.

Yet the Labor government's role was buried by the speakers at the UTS rally. NTEU Branch President Sarah Attfield, who chaired the rally, said: "We don't know why the uni wants the cuts."

Attfield and the other NTEU representatives did not actually oppose the budget cuts. One speaker, James Goodman, stated: "Our priority is to put up the alternatives." That is, not to oppose budget cuts, but to work with management to implement them.

This was in line with the NTEU's email call for the rally, which blamed the cuts on "mistakes" by the University Leadership Team. It urged the vice-chancellor to "share the financial details that would help staff understand how we got into this predicament, and let us co-develop plans to get us out."

Another speaker, Paddy Gibson, a member of the pseudo-left

Solidarity group and the NTEU branch committee, was equally silent on Labor's cuts. He said that when management cut staff at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic it "cost them money" because they ended up hiring new staff to replace them. "If they [management] are going to grow the uni, they need us," he said.

UTS Student Association President Mia Campbell said the cuts were a management "choice." She demanded that the UTS management engage in "consultation" before making any changes.

Yasmin Johnson, from the pseudo-left Socialist Alternative student club, said the fact that international students were used as cash cows was partly the responsibility of university management and "the government," but did not name Labor.

A casual academic who led the chants at the rally called for staff to join the NTEU and prepare to strike, but said strikes would only be legal at the end of the year when the next enterprise bargaining period began.

A University Academic Programs Office (UAPO) ex-staff member reported that her unit had been destroyed and replaced with AI, with six staff made redundant and two redeployed.

Attfield called for staff to sign a petition to support the UAPO, even though the unit had already been dissolved.

Far from any call for a unified fight across the country against Labor's cuts, the rally concluded with Attfield asking: "What next? It's all about you." She said staff members could do many things, such as "wave a flag, put up a poster, have a conversation."

The rally provided a warning of the role being played by the NTEU apparatus and its pseudo-left partners around the country in diverting and suppressing the opposition of university workers to Labor's offensive.

This is creating the conditions for university managements to proceed, including by using misnamed "voluntary" redundancy schemes to eliminate hundreds of jobs, with the help of the NTEU and the other main campus union, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU).

The ANU in Canberra has now opened such a scheme, with the intent of cutting \$100 million from its staffing costs over the next 12 months, the equivalent of about 650 jobs. This is in addition to cutting operating costs by \$150 million over the

same period.

Similarly, the University of Canberra (UC) plans to cut 120 professional staff jobs as well as 71 academic jobs—almost 200 in total—citing a \$30 million deficit for the calendar year 2024. This is particularly revealing because UC’s newly appointed vice-chancellor is ex-Labor leader and cabinet member Bill Shorten.

Shorten boasted to the media last week that he was confident of turning around UC’s financial difficulties by implementing the job cuts. He told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC): “That process started before I got here but we are determined to make sure that we have to do that sort of difficult stuff once and then we can just talk about growth.”

Shorten said he could not rule out more job cuts, but he did not want to see any more forced redundancies. That is a recipe for working with the union leaders to smother opposition by axing jobs via “voluntary” redundancies—a method repeatedly employed by the union bureaucrats, including Shorten himself, an ex-Australian Workers Union boss.

Shorten was a key minister in the same Labor government that is responsible for the university sector’s financial woes. He also served as a senior minister during the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments of 2007 to 2013, which imposed huge cuts to tertiary education funding as part of their “education revolution.”

The University of Wollongong (UoW) management was one of the first to announce large job cuts flowing from Labor’s international student caps, also employing “voluntary redundancies.”

In an interview with the ABC, Associate Professor Shoshana Dreyfus from UoW said: “There is almost nothing about this that is voluntary. We are not waiting around to leave the university. The experience is pretty awful. I’m now calling it forced voluntary redundancy.”

Entire teaching disciplines at UoW are being abolished or drastically reduced, including in languages, science and technology and cultural studies. Linguistics had two-thirds of its jobs cut, and Mathematics and Statistics lost 40 percent of its associate professor and professor roles. The university is cutting more than 90 academic positions, including via forced redundancies. In a further phase this month, professional staff positions will be cut.

At Sydney’s Macquarie University, a similar assault has been foreshadowed. At a meeting with staff, the vice-chancellor announced a process of repositioning and refocusing its workforce. Courses and programs of study that were deemed less attractive to students are under threat, as are the staff who teach in those programs.

Universities Australia, the employers’ group, reported last year that funding for universities had fallen in real terms by \$2 billion since 2020. The Labor government is using this financial squeeze to enforce its Universities Accord, which demands that universities subordinate both their teaching and

research to the interests of big business and preparations for war, such as the AUKUS military pact.

Nationally, the NTEU is trying to shield the Labor government by claiming that the avalanche of job cuts is due to mismanagement and excessive executive salaries. NTEU National President Alison Barnes said, for example: “What’s unfolding at ANU is a direct result of a national university governance crisis, which allows unaccountable vice-chancellors on a million dollars a year to wreak havoc on our public institutions.”

A historic assault is also underway on free speech, with management at the University of Sydney and others moving to prohibit any form of political dissent on campus, particularly against the continuing US-backed Israeli atrocities in the Middle East.

At Macquarie University, Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah, a well-known sociologist, has become a prominent victim of an escalating witch hunt by the federal and state governments, corporate media and Zionist lobby groups against educators who oppose the genocide in Palestine.

Opposition exists throughout the universities to the job destruction, course closures, pro-corporate restructuring and suppression of dissent. But the NTEU and CPSU leaders have for years opposed any unified fight by university staff and students.

That is why we are calling for the formation of rank-and-file committees (RFCs) at every university. University staff, along with students, need to form their own organisations of struggle to develop and fight for demands based on the educational and financial needs of students and staff.

To discuss these issues and how to form RFCs, please contact the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators’ network:

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

Twitter: [CFPE_Australia](https://twitter.com/CFPE_Australia)

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact