

# Union blocks motion to defend Randa Abdel-Fattah at Sydney's Macquarie University

**Our correspondents****14 March 2025**

A Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee (RFC) member was prevented from moving a resolution in defence of Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah at a National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) online meeting at the university on Thursday.

The RFC resolution called for an urgent campus meeting and rally of staff and students to fight moves to sack Abdel-Fattah, a widely respected Macquarie University academic who is being targeted because of her high-profile opposition to the ongoing US-backed Israeli genocide and ethnic cleansing in Palestine.

Like a growing number of academics and journalists, Abdel-Fattah has been falsely branded as antisemitic for denouncing the criminal atrocities being committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, which are now escalating with the full backing of the Trump administration.

Urgent action is essential because Abdel-Fattah's employment is directly threatened by a decision of the Australian Research Council (ARC), acting at the behest of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's federal Labor government, to freeze her ARC Future Fellowship research grant.

About 240 staff and students attended Thursday's meeting to discuss the threat to jobs, course offerings and employment conditions posed by the university management's "Blueprint for Academic Workforce Planning," as well as the defence of Abdel-Fattah.

NTEU branch president Nick Harrigan had written to Macquarie RFC member Chris Gordon on Wednesday to assure him that he could move the RFC resolution that Gordon had sent to the NTEU branch committee on Tuesday. The resolution stated:

As a matter of urgency, the NTEU at Macquarie University must call an all staff and student meeting and rally to defend Abdel-Fattah, and insist that her employment be continued and that the ARC and

university reinstate her research grant.

Harrigan wrote: "We will be debating motions on Randa's situation in the last 15-20 minutes of the meeting. I will put your motion into the slides and you will have a chance to speak to it."

At Thursday's meeting however, Harrigan declared that the resolution would not be put to a vote. He claimed that this was because "this is an all-staff meeting, not an NTEU members meeting" and there was "a debate about whether motions are allowed or not."

Harrigan said: "We have decided to not have motions until we can resolve this debate in the next week or two."

That means seriously delaying any real action to defend Abdel-Fattah, despite numerous participants in the meeting posting comments in the chat voicing support for her.

Gordon posted the Macquarie RFC resolution in the chat but Harrigan, who chaired the meeting, refused to allow Gordon to move it.

Toward the end of the meeting, Gordon was able to speak briefly on the resolution. "This is a test case for trampling over both employment and democratic rights, including academic freedom and free speech," he warned.

"The ARC froze Abdel-Fattah's fellowship just a month after federal Education Minister [Jason] Clare ordered the ARC to investigate her grant. The supposed reason is that she allegedly bent ARC rules by holding an online workshop as part of the grant, instead of a formal academic conference.

"Clearly Abdel-Fattah has been targeted because she has been falsely branded as antisemitic for denouncing the criminal atrocities being committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank."

Gordon said: "There is support for the defence of Abdel-Fattah, but it must be mobilised. A legalistic behind-the-scenes approach doesn't expose the agenda against Abdel-Fattah for what it is, nor connect it to the many others who are under attack."

He concluded: "We do need to pass a resolution and hold a

meeting. We need to hold a public rally at Macquarie and other campuses to defend Abdel-Fattah, as soon as possible!"

The decision to block the resolution flies in the face of a unanimous vote by a lunchtime meeting of some 70 educators, students and workers organised by the Macquarie RFC on February 21 to call for a campaign throughout the universities and the working class as a whole for the defence of Abdel-Fattah.

The refusal to allow Thursday's meeting to vote on the resolution is in line with the NTEU's role throughout the genocide. As well as Abdel-Fattah, other anti-genocide academics are known to have been targeted, but the NTEU has not made a single public statement in their defence, let alone organise any campaign against the witch hunt. Those victimised include University of Sydney academics John Keane and Nick Riemer and the same university's sociology professor Sujatha Fernandes.

There was determined opposition by NTEU branch officials when rank-and-file committee members and supporters successfully moved similar resolutions at NTEU branch meetings last month at the University of Sydney and Western Sydney University, as they had earlier done at Footscray High School in Melbourne.

As is clear from Clare's intervention, the Labor government is centrally involved in the witch hunt, which is being mounted by the corporate media, the political establishment and Zionist groups. Labor MP Josh Burns, the chair of the Labor government's "antisemitism" parliamentary committee, publicly demanded to know why Macquarie University had not already sacked her.

This offensive is intensifying. On Wednesday, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), the government's university regulator, named Macquarie University, together with the Australian National University, Queensland University of Technology and the University of Sydney, as targets of "live compliance processes" relating to unspecified complaints of antisemitism.

TEQSA also told a Senate committee inquiry into "university governance" that it wanted stronger punishment powers to obtain warrants, fine universities and suspend courses for regulatory breaches, including supposed failures to ensure student safety from campus protests like last year's anti-genocide encampments.

Earlier in Thursday's NTEU meeting, Gordon warned that the Macquarie management's "Blueprint" was also part of a wider attack spearheaded by the Labor government.

University managements across the country are pushing ahead with over 2,000 job cuts, as a direct result of the Albanese government's reactionary cuts to international student enrolments on top of Labor's deepening of the

decades-long chronic under-funding of tertiary education.

The government is using this financial pressure to enforce its Universities Accord, which ties funding for both teaching and research to meeting the needs of employers and the military, including the AUKUS preparations for a US-led war against China.

Despite warning of a likely wave of cuts at Macquarie, the NTEU's response to the management's "Blueprint" is to "engage" with the "process" and propose a petition with an alternative "vision" for the university. That amounts to accepting the Labor government's agenda and assisting management to implement it.

"To see it as a Macquarie problem is to miss the point," Gordon told the meeting. "And if we stay within a Macquarie framework, we are going to be defeated. We need to conduct a fight of staff and students across the sector..."

"No mention has been made of the Labor Party. They are leading the attack. We must have a political fight against them."

"We need to build rank-and-file committees across the sector to represent our interests."

To break out of the NTEU straitjacket, we appeal to educators, students and workers to make statements or pass resolutions calling for action in defence of Abdel-Fattah and all the other targets of the Zionist-led witch hunt.

To discuss moving resolutions, send statements of support, or join or build a rank-and-file committee, 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

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout



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