

Oppose Labor’s “national priorities” university restructuring and job cuts

Committee for Public Education and IYSSE (Australia)

13 October 2025

In sync with the Trump administration and capitalist governments internationally, the Albanese Labor government in Australia is demanding a pro-corporate and pro-war transformation of the country’s 39 public universities.

This restructuring, combined with steep cuts to international student enrolments, is driving the destruction of some 4,000 academic and administrative staff jobs nationally. This is also radically impacting the education quality, course options and futures of students.

We have called an urgent public meeting, in Sydney and online, for October 26 to discuss how to fight this historic offensive. [Click here to register now.](#)

The meeting has been convened by the rank-and-file committees at Western Sydney University (WSU) and Macquarie University, the Committee for Public Education (CPFE)—the educators’ rank-and-file network—and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party.

While posturing as opposing aspects of the job losses, the two main campus trade unions, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), are assisting the government and the university managements to impose this reactionary agenda.

That was laid bare on October 2, when WSU vice-chancellor and president George Williams sent an all-staff email thanking both unions for their “goodwill and constructive engagement” in striking a deal to assist in slashing hundreds of jobs and restructuring the largely working-class university. “This means that our change process will now proceed and is back on track,” he wrote.

As a result, about a quarter of the staff will be affected, together with the students. Nearly 200 jobs will be eliminated and about 500 other staff members in “disestablished” positions will be forced to compete against each other for “new roles” that are deemed “suitable” for them by the management.

This “change process” refers to the “Western Reset” restructuring of WSU to service the teaching and research requirements of the corporate elite, including the military industries, particularly at the expense of arts and humanities.

Similar processes are underway at every university, invariably targeting critical disciplines such as history,

anthropology, sociology, drama and music, depriving students of broader, cultured and informed choices in terms of their courses, careers and lives.

The October 26 public meeting will discuss the connection between these developments in Australia and what is happening internationally, particularly the ideological refashioning of universities and the entire education system by the fascistic Trump administration in the United States.

This month the White House sent a letter to universities, titled the “Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education,” demanding that they advance the “national interests and priorities of the U.S. government.”

This is the Trump administration’s latest assault on education. It is an American version of the Nazi policy of *Gleichschaltung*, that is, the integration of culture and education into the arms of the state as a propaganda tool.

Some of the demands include prohibiting faculty from speaking about political and social issues, cutting fees for students in “hard science programs” that serve military purposes, and reducing the proportion of international students to less than 15 percent.

The response by educators and students at many universities has been hostile, with votes and petitions opposing the demand.

There is no brick wall between this “compact” and the similar demands that confront staff and students in Australia.

In the pursuit of its own pro-corporate and pro-military agenda, the Labor government is also promoting foul nationalism. That includes seeking to blame international students for the continuing housing affordability and cost-of-living crisis affecting working-class households, while the wealth of the property developers and other billionaires soars to new heights.

Like at WSU, the union apparatuses are working hand-in-glove with university administrations to suppress resistance to this agenda and the massive destruction of jobs. At WSU, the NTEU anti-democratically blocked debate and bulldozed a resolution through a hastily-called online members’ meeting to endorse its sellout, despite considerable opposition.

In desperate bids to cover their tracks, the NTEU and CPSU are denouncing the university managements for employing corporate consultants and accusing them of overstating their

financial crises. But the union officials are collaborating with the very same managements to implement the restructuring!

The reality is that the unions are helping push people out the door, either via so-called voluntary redundancies or the sham “consultation” processes in union enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs) with managements, which offer little or no protection against retrenchments.

Above all, the union officials are covering up the driving force of this assault—the Labor government’s agenda. Like the White House, it is restructuring tertiary education to align with “national priorities,” that is, to satisfy the dictates of big business and develop a war economy, notably through the AUKUS pact against China.

That is the central thrust of Labor’s 2024 Universities Accord report, as highlighted by a recent speech by ex-Labor and union leader Bill Shorten. Shorten, now a university vice-chancellor, called for the “fundamental reimaging” of universities as a “core instrument of our national power” under conditions of global instability and war.

Shorten outlined replacing many university degrees with a “modular system” of mini qualifications “to produce the thousands of nuclear engineers, cyber specialists, and AI technicians that the AUKUS enterprise demands, at a pace that matches the urgency of our strategic environment.”

This was not just an educational reform, Shorten insisted, but “a national security and foreign policy imperative” for “national survival.”

The Accord report nominated “areas of national priority like clean energy, critical technology, minerals and defence,” saying they “will need more skilled professionals.” All these fields are related to the geo-strategic interests of Australian imperialism and its commitment to US war plans.

One of the Accord report’s models was “to support AUKUS, the University of South Australia partnering with the South Australian government, the Australian Industry Group and the defence industry to develop university degree apprenticeships to support the construction of nuclear-powered submarines.”

The AUKUS military pact involves spending hundreds of billions to acquire US and UK nuclear-powered attack submarines, long-range missiles and other hi-tech weaponry designed for use against China. It is a spearhead of the Albanese government’s plans for a “all of nation” war economy, with universities on the front line.

While obscuring this agenda—with which they basically agree—the NTEU and CPSU officials are trying to blame mismanagement by individual vice-chancellors for the disaster across the entire sector, even as they help them achieve their goals.

Not a word is being said about the fact that the Labor government is spending increasing billions on military spending, not least to satisfy the demands of the Trump administration, while intensifying the financial pressure on the universities to restructure to align with the “national priorities”

set out in the Universities Accord.

That financial pressure includes slashing international student enrolments and continuing the previous Liberal-National government’s “Job-ready Graduates” scheme that hiked the cost of three-year humanities degrees to more than \$50,000, while cutting the funding to universities for delivering them.

In a revealing echo of the Trump administration’s “compact” language, from January 1, each university’s funding will be tied to a “mission-based compact” with the government’s new Australian Tertiary Education Commission to contribute to the “national priorities.”

The record of the NTEU and CPSU is no aberration. It flows from the transformation of the trade unions internationally from defensive organisations of the working class, always within the framework of wage labour, into industrial policing agencies. In Australia, this has taken the form of the anti-strike enterprise bargaining straitjacket first imposed by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Hawke-Keating Labor governments in the 1980s and 1990s.

That is why there is no prospect of steering or pressuring the union apparatuses away from this course. They are thoroughly integrated into the corporate and political establishment.

We must develop rank-and-file committees (RFCs) as the new forms of organisation that the working class requires to defend itself. These committees of university workers and students can elaborate and fight for demands based on their interests, and those of high-quality education, not the dictates of the corporate elites and their parliamentary servants.

Through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), they can link up with the educators’ RFCs in the US and elsewhere, and with workers in every industry worldwide. This can lay the foundations for overturning capitalism itself and establishing genuine democratic and socialist workers’ governments.

To discuss these critical issues and how to form RFCs, join our public meeting on Sunday October 26. You can register here.

Public meeting:

Oppose Labor’s “national priorities” university restructuring and job cuts

Noon, Sunday October 26
Boronia Grove Community Centre
40 Victoria St Epping, NSW
and online via Zoom.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact