

Union helps management block socialist student campaign at Australian university

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The Committee for Public Education and International Youth and Students for Social Equality have called an urgent public meeting, in Sydney and online, tomorrow, October 26, to discuss how to fight Labor's university restructuring and job cuts. Following the huge "No Kings" protests, David Rye, a leader of the US Educators Rank-and-File Committee, will join our speakers to discuss the parallels between the Trump regime's assault on educators and students and the Labor government-driven pro-corporate and pro-military restructuring and job destruction throughout Australian universities. Click here to register now.

Developments on Thursday at the University of Newcastle, two hours north of Sydney, show how the campus trade union officials and university managements are working together to try to stifle opposition to the Australian Labor government's pro-corporate and pro-military restructuring of universities, and the accompanying destruction of some 4,000 jobs nationally.

At a half-day strike rally, National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) representatives partnered with the university's security team to ban members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) from campaigning at the event, even though it was held in the open air on the university campus.

Despite having long been a registered club on campus, IYSSE members were blocked from circulating *World Socialist Web Site* articles on the crisis of Australian universities and this Sunday's online public meeting, "Oppose Labor's 'national priorities' university restructuring and job cuts," jointly called by the IYSSE and the Committee for Public Education, the educators' rank-and-file network.

A university security representative told a club member that one of the NTEU rally organizers had said that the IYSSE was not part of the event, which was joined by about 200 staff members. To shut down the IYSSE campaign, the security representative invoked the Campus Access Policy (CAP) introduced in October 2024.

The CAP was part of a barrage of similar policies imposed at universities across Australia and internationally to suppress students and staff opposition to the Gaza genocide. The initial target of the CAP were anti-Israeli genocide student encampments, but Thursday's ban underscores the far wider political censorship involved.

Last month, security officials also cited the CAP to bar the IYSSE from holding an anti-genocide speakout, making the false and anti-democratic claim that the use of a PA system would "harass" students walking past. Previously, however, the IYSSE has regularly held speakouts on campus since 2010 without needing approval from security.

This Sunday's public meeting will discuss a strategy for university students and workers to fight the Albanese government-driven university restructuring, which is in line with the fascistic and militarist agenda of the Trump administration and other capitalist governments around the world.

The blocking of the IYSSE campaign is a stark expression of the role that the trade union apparatuses are playing nationally and internationally to prevent discussion with students and workers on the critical political issues at stake.

At the largely working-class University of Newcastle (UoN), like at all Australia's 39 public universities, hundreds of jobs are being targeted. According to documents seen by staff members, about 205 full-time jobs are to be axed. Staff who lose their jobs will be compelled to compete for 97 new jobs that will supposedly be created.

Yet the NTEU and the other main university union, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), are everywhere intent on isolating the struggles against the job destruction and restructuring. They are trying to blame individual managements for the offensive, not the underlying pro-business and pro-military program of the Labor government, which was outlined in its 2024 Universities Accord report.

The half-day strike at UoN indicates that tertiary education workers are looking for a way to fight. NTEU branch members had previously voted overwhelmingly for

industrial action.

However, the rally was dominated by speeches pleading with management to be “reasonable” and complaining about a “lack of progress” on enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) negotiations over the past six months.

At the rally, the NTEU branch president Terry Summers made clear that the union accepts the management’s Business Improvement Program (BIP), a corporate restructuring plan that aims to save up to \$22 million annually by slashing jobs and courses.

“We’re not saying that the university can’t change the way that it operates,” Summers told the rally. “No one is trying to do that. All we are trying to say is, be reasonable. If you are going to get rid of people, try to be fair.”

In other words, the union’s role, as elsewhere around the country, is to partner with management in negotiating job cuts and restructuring, including by driving people out via “voluntary redundancies,” in order to suffocate resistance, not to fight the cuts.

At a September 18 NTEU members’ meeting, officials reported that the management had rejected the union’s EBA log of claims, which includes a 4 percent per annum pay rise until the end of 2029. Even that would be another wage cut in real terms, because of the soaring cost of living and housing.

In response to the management applying to the government’s Fair Work Commission (FWC) to shut down the dispute, the NTEU has reportedly lodged a dispute with the same FWC, saying that the university-wide changes are in breach of the current EBA and Workplace Health and Safety requirements.

Far from calling for a unified struggle across Australia to stop the job cuts, the NTEU is seeking to channel the anger and opposition of workers back behind Labor’s pro-employer Fair Work industrial arbitration system, which functions to smother the class struggle.

Nationally, the NTEU is fraudulently claiming victories at Western Sydney University and Australian National University. But hundreds of jobs are being eliminated at both, including by “voluntary” redundancies and “spill and fill” processes that force workers to compete against each other for fewer jobs as the result of restructuring.

This is all in line with the Labor government’s Universities Accord report, which insisted that universities must focus both their teaching and research on meeting the needs of business and the AUKUS military plan for a US-led war against China.

The Albanese government is applying intense financial pressure on the universities to restructure along these lines, including by cutting enrolments by international students 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 reducing the funding to universities for delivering them.

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 “national priorities.”

This language is similar to that of the Trump administration. 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” or be defunded.

The suppression of the IYSSE campaign at UoN shows the need for joint rank-and-file committees (RFCs) of university workers and students, independent of the union bureaucracies and corporate management, to oppose this restructuring and job destruction and to link their struggles across the country and internationally.

While the union apparatuses claim to be in battle against individual university managements, they are in fact united in trying to block such a development.

Political conclusions need to be drawn.

The fight against job destruction, the suppression of wages and the militarisation of education cannot be waged within the framework of the NTEU, CPSU and other unions.

It requires a conscious political break from these institutions and the building of new organisations, RFCs, through which workers and students can elaborate and fight for demands based on their interests and futures, not the dictates of the corporate elites and their parliamentary and trade union servants.

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.



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