

Australia: False claims of “backflip” on job and course cuts at University Technology Sydney

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2 December 2025

On Wednesday last week about 150 people, mostly University of Technology Sydney (UTS) staff, rallied outside the campus in central Sydney after the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) called a four-hour stoppage as part of the union’s enterprise bargaining with UTS management.

At the rally, NTEU speakers claimed to be winning the fight against the management’s plans, announced earlier this year, to slash \$100 million from the university’s budget by 2027 by cutting 400 jobs—about a tenth of the workforce. The plans included stopping new enrolments for nearly a fifth of the university’s courses, notably in international studies, social sciences, education and public health.

Similarly shocking restructures have been unveiled at many, at least 19, of the country’s 39 public universities in 2025, with proposed job cuts rising above 3,500 nationally.

As at UTS, limited stoppages have been called by the NTEU at several universities across Australia in recent days. The union leadership is trying to channel immense discontent over the destruction of jobs and pro-corporate restructuring nationally back into union-run negotiations over new three-year enterprise agreements (EAs). But these agreements will do no more than the current EAs to halt this offensive.

The NTEU’s New South Wales (NSW) division secretary Vince Caughley told the UTS rally participants: “We are winning.” Caughley insisted that the union’s campaign to expose a “lack of accountability” on the part of management would “turn the tables” on the attack at UTS.

Referring to a no-confidence petition against UTS vice-chancellor Andrew Parfitt, Caughley said: “I checked the vote and we have well over a thousand people here (who

have signed the no-confidence petition) ... one fantastic way to end the year.”

NTEU speakers claimed that an “Academic Change” proposal update circulated by Parfitt on the day of the rally contained “significant concessions.”

The next day, an article appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* falsely stating that the update “backflipped on plans for mass redundancies and course cuts.” The article cited Caughley’s comment that the union “certainly welcomed” management’s changed plan.

In fact, far from containing “significant concessions,” Parfitt’s update showed that the majority of job cuts and course closures are still planned to proceed.

The update says that “the majority of academic staff reductions are likely to be met through voluntary separation” and “changes to some of the courses proposed for discontinuation ... will result in slightly fewer staffing reductions.”

In other words, only “slightly fewer” jobs cuts are proposed, and forced redundancies have not been ruled out.

The update states that the international studies degree is to be “redesigned” and teaching degrees would be preserved by “streamlining our subjects and redesigning” the course. The law faculty and the business school would not be merged, but instead would share some services and governance arrangements. Public health undergraduate courses would continue to be suspended, while most postgraduate public health studies would continue.

All these changes were said to be subject to the release of “the final change implementation plan,” not to be announced until February 2026.

The reality is that the cuts are already proceeding, with staff members being pressured into accepting them.

An academic who attended the rally told the *World*

Socialist Web Site that, faced with the prospect of the complete removal of the course, staff had put together an alternative model which could result in the loss of half of the jobs involved in the international studies courses. Another staff member who works in international studies said she was not sure if her job was secure but she was at least relieved that students could complete the courses they had commenced.

In effect, the union is creating the conditions for the job losses and course cuts to take place in slightly modified forms. This is a warning of the union's readiness to work with the UTS administration to get people out the door via expressions of interest in so-called voluntary redundancies, as it has at other universities, including Western Sydney University.

The union's UTS enterprise bargaining log of claims proposes to "improve job security" by "prohibiting forced redundancies and strengthening provisions for redeployment of staff whose positions are disestablished."

Such clauses have proven no protection against restructuring. The NTEU has a long track record of assisting managements to achieve job cuts via "voluntary" redundancies.

For the past year, the NTEU and the other main campus trade union, the Community and Public Service Union (CPSU), have worked to block calls, particularly by the rank-and-file committees at Western Sydney University and Macquarie University, for unified national action against the cuts and the underlying measures of the Labor government.

The Albanese Labor government is deliberately applying financial pressure to the universities, including by reactionary cuts to international student enrolments, to restructure in line with the government's Universities Accord, which demands the subordination of both teaching and research to "national priorities."

These priorities include the AUKUS pact for the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines and other weaponry, as part of preparations for a US-led war against China.

The Labor government's role was buried by the speakers at Wednesday's rally. NTEU general secretary Damien Cahill blamed "widespread financial mismanagement" for the job losses at UTS, saying they were "completely unnecessary."

The union leadership is trying to confine protests to individual universities, blaming particular vice-chancellors for the cuts and to head off calls for unified action nationally against the underlying agenda of the

Labor government.

University staff are aware of the growing links to the military buildup. A lecturer who attended the rally told the WWS: "It does concern me that the university derives a substantial chunk of its revenue from the military industrial complex."

Asked about the cuts to overseas student numbers, he also commented: "I think that those cuts are unnecessary and that international students are likely being scapegoated for a housing crisis caused by a decade or so of Coalition government inaction in relation to the building of new housing, but also the way in which housing is administered, or rather not administered at all, by the state in the interests of the wealthy."

Opposition exists throughout the universities to the job destruction, course closures and pro-corporate restructuring. But the unions are standing in the way of any unified fight by university staff and students.

This can be answered only by the formation of rank-and-file committees (RFCs), independent of the unions, at every university. Staff and 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, not the dictates of the Labor government, the financial markets and the war machine.

To discuss these issues and how to form RFCs, 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)



To contact the WWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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