

Staff and students oppose sellout union deals at Western Sydney University

Western Sydney University Rank-and-File Committee
21 July 2026

An important discussion developed when the Western Sydney University (WSU) Rank-and-File Committee hosted an urgent online lunchtime meeting yesterday, titled “Oppose the sellout union agreements at WSU! Build rank-and-file committees!”

The meeting was part of the campaign for a No vote by all WSU staff members on the regressive professional and academic staff enterprise agreements that management and the two campus trade unions are trying to rush through via a snap online ballot of all staff next Monday to Wednesday.

At the meeting, called with the support of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) club at WSU, students, as well as staff members, raised key questions and voiced enthusiasm for the campaign, including by passing unanimously a resolution to endorse it.

Michael Head, a longtime educator at WSU and a member of the WSU Rank-and-File Committee (RFC), chaired the meeting and gave an opening report. He said the RFC was the only one providing staff with detailed outlines of both documents, each more than 120 pages long.

“That is part of what RFCs do: provide the information that workers and young people need,” he said.

Head explained that the proposed new four-year agreements would impose further real pay cuts, increase workloads and facilitate more job destruction and restructuring. That was on top of the WSU “Reset” restructuring disaster, which has already cut nearly 200 jobs and displaced about 600 professional staff.

Head’s report highlighted some of the main features of the agreements, including another four years of sub-inflationary pay rises—this time averaging just 3.5 percent annually—way below the soaring cost of living, further fuelled by the ongoing impact of the escalating criminal US-Israeli war on Iran.

Management could also increase professional staff workloads due to “organisational change, new workflows and processes, or changes to technical systems and infrastructure.”

Academics could be loaded up by their supervisors with

extra teaching, up to 60 percent of their workload, and class preparation time would be cut, with no time allowed for supposed “repeat” classes.

During the next four years, employees could also be subjected to more than one “organisational change” that may result in retrenchment. More “fill and spill” operations could force displaced staff members to compete against each other for reduced numbers of jobs via a “Comparative Assessment Process.”

There are no guaranteed casual conversions, AI systems can be utilised to eliminate jobs and accelerated vague misconduct and “unsatisfactory performance” processes would give staff members less time to challenge victimisations.

Most staff members, who are not union members, had not even had access to the documents until Monday. No one has been given adequate time, in a hectic first week of semester, to properly read and review, let alone discuss and debate them.

Students have been given no access to them at all, even though the agreements will mean larger classes, narrower study options, less educational support and fewer services.

“This is not just a WSU issue,” Head said. “These proposed agreements are a model for similar deals at individual universities across Australia. This is after the unions, the NTEU [National Tertiary Education Union] and CPSU [Community and Public Sector Union] blocked all calls for unified action nationally against the restructuring and elimination of some 4,000 jobs throughout the 39 public universities over the past two years.”

Head outlined key initial demands proposed by the WSU RFC in its statement calling for a No vote. They included pay increases of 35 percent to cover inflation and recover past losses, halt all increased workloads and cuts to class preparation times, permanency for all casuals who want it, free first-class education for all students and billions for education, not war.

“For four decades, the NTEU and CPSU have imposed sellout EAs in the universities, cutting wages in real terms

and assisting restructuring,” he said. “Like all the trade unions, they have transformed into arms of management, especially since the union Accords with the Hawke and Keating Labor governments of the 1980s and 1990s.”

Now the Albanese government was starving the universities of adequate funding, along with public schools and public hospitals, and gutting the National Disability Insurance Scheme—the biggest cut to a social program in Australian history—while allocating hundreds of billions of dollars for AUKUS and other war preparations.

“To fight this offensive, university workers and students need to build genuinely democratic new forms of organisation—rank-and-file committees totally independent of the complicit trade unions.

“These committees must be open to all students and staff, including the majority of university workers who are not union members. RFCs will become organising networks, providing and spreading information and analysis.

“Our struggle can and must be connected to the rising working class resistance internationally and in Australia, as seen in the vote by Victorian public school educators to reject another sellout deal between the Australian Education Union and the state Labor government.”

Among the questions and contributions to the discussion, Carolyn Kennett from the Macquarie University RFC warned that the accelerated misconduct procedures were connected to Education Minister Jason Clare’s threat to deregister and cut funding to universities that failed to meet the Labor government’s new Threshold Standards, in particular by failing to sufficiently suppress opposition to the worsening US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

WSU IYSSE club president Zach Diotte urged students to join the WSU RFC and the campaign. “Students cannot stand on the sidelines and hope staff win better conditions for us,” he said. “We have to fight alongside them. The RFC’s demands—reverse job cuts, maximum class sizes of 20, free first-class education, scrap student debts—are staff *and* student demands.”

A staff member asked for further details on how the enterprise agreements affected both professional and academic staff. Head gave several examples, including clauses that permitted retrenchments in supposed “exceptional circumstances,” such as cuts in government funding or adverse economic developments.

A student spoke about the violent police arrests of WSU students peacefully demonstrating against the Gaza genocide in October 2024. Another participant spoke about the vicious police rampage against protesters outside Sydney Town Hall during Israeli President Isaac Herzog’s visit in February this year at the Albanese government’s invitation.

Another student commented: “The Albanese

government’s decision to restrict funding to universities seems almost like the feelings of Zionists matter more than the lives of Palestinian people.”

A WSU academic asked: “What’s the substitute for Labor? The rise of Pauline Hanson as Labor gets unpopular is also worrying for migrant communities. Hanson is talking about her mass deportation plan.”

Head said Hanson was only able to falsely posture as an anti-establishment alternative because the Labor government was attacking the living standards, social programs and democratic rights of the working class, while also trying to outdo Hanson by slashing immigration and deporting refugees to Nauru under barbaric conditions. The task was to build a genuine socialist movement.

The meeting concluded by endorsing this resolution:

That this meeting endorses the call by the Western Sydney University Rank-and-File Committee for a No vote by all staff members on both the professional and academic staff enterprise agreements proposed by the management and the trade unions.

We oppose these agreements because they again cut real wages, increase workloads, facilitate further job cuts and restructuring, provide no permanency for casuals, and accelerate misconduct and unsatisfactory performance procedures.

If not rejected, these agreements will set a model for similar regressive deals across the universities. We support the call for the establishment of rank-and-file committees everywhere to fight for demands based on what staff and students need, not the dictates of the financial markets and the Albanese government.

We urge all students and staff to join the Vote No campaign and to join the WSU Rank-and-File Committee or contact us to build RFCs elsewhere:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

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



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