Australia: Significant opposition to union sellout deal at Western Sydney University

A WSU Rank-and-File Committee member
1 August 2026

There were sizeable “no” votes by Western Sydney University (WSU) staff members this week against new union-management enterprise agreements that deepen real pay cuts, increase workloads and clear the way for further job cuts and pro-corporate restructuring.

According to WSU management, of the staff who participated in the online ballots, 82.83 percent of academic staff voted “yes” for the Academic Staff Agreement and 91.79 percent of professional staff voted for the Professional Staff Agreement.

This means that, even among the staff who actually voted, nearly 20 percent of the academics and almost 10 percent of their professional colleagues rejected the enterprise agreements (EAs), which had been negotiated behind closed doors for months with representatives of the two main campus unions, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU).

The rejection rates are almost four times higher than the last enterprise agreement vote at WSU in 2022, when 95.1 percent of academics and 97.45 percent of professional staff voted yes.

As in 2022, WSU management provided no information on the actual numbers of staff who voted and has not responded to requests to release that figure.

If the low turnout in a similar ballot at the University of Newcastle last week is any guide, the WSU agreements may also have less than half positive support. At Newcastle, the turnout for the vote to accept the agreement was only 31 percent of academic staff and 43 percent of professional staff.

This indicates growing hostility to trade union betrayals, not just to the sellout three-year agreements that the union apparatuses are trying to push through individual universities across Australia this year, but more broadly in the working class, including the public school educators in Victoria who have twice rejected another deal between the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the state Labor government.

Against the fraudulent claims of the union officials that the WSU EAs represent victories with good pay rises and improved conditions, the WSU Rank-and-File Committee was the only organisation informing staff and students about the real contents of the documents.

Many staff had no time, in the first hectic week of a new semester, to read, let alone properly review, discuss and debate the agreements, each more than 120 pages long.

As we documented in detail at our online lunchtime meeting and in our statement and articles, published on the *World Socialist Web Site*, the agreements feature further wage cuts—nominal rises averaging 3.5 percent a year, well below the soaring cost of living, which is being fuelled by the impact of the criminal US-Israeli war on Iran.

Both the academic and professional staff EAs increase workloads, including reduced class preparation times and clauses allowing professional staff to have higher workloads imposed on them.

The agreements provide no protection against more restructuring and job loss, just after the two unions agreed last August to management’s “Reset” program, which axed nearly 200 jobs and displaced about 600 professional staff members, as part of similar restructurings nationally that eliminated up to 4,000 jobs.

The EAs drop previous promises of permitting some of the thousands of casuals at WSU to seek permanency. They also contain accelerated unsatisfactory performance, misconduct, illness and injury processes that management can use to victimise and dismiss dissident staff members.

The agreements reinforce an array of joint union-management committees, headed by the EA Implementation Committee. They show management’s reliance on a partnership with the unions to stifle resistance and discontent.

The WSU Rank-and-File Committee organised an important campaign for a no vote by all WSU workers, whether academic or professional staff, or union or non-union members. We had campaign teams on numerous WSU campuses, including Kingswood, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Parramatta City, Parramatta South and Bankstown.

We found warm support, including from students. Some staff members said they had already voted no, while others knew nothing about the EAs until we explained their contents.

By contrast, the pseudo-left groups, such as Socialist Alternative’s “WSU Socialists,” voiced no opposition to the retrograde EAs, effectively lining up behind the union apparatuses.

The WSU Rank-and-File Committee, comprised of staff and students, will now lead the fight against the enforcement of the

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EAs by the management and the unions, including workload demands, job losses and course cuts.

We will be in the forefront also of the struggle against the underlying agenda: the Albanese Labor government's reshaping of tertiary education along pro-corporate and militaristic lines, its crackdown on anti-genocide and other dissent, and its threats to deregister universities that do not comply.

At our committee meeting this week, a student reported that students in the Bachelor of Creative Leadership program had been asked to write essays on how they would argue for going to war! She also voiced concerns by staff and students over cuts to psychology courses, designed to push students into the workforce without adequate research experience.

Similar EAs are being negotiated at individual universities across the country, locking staff into agreements during which they will be barred from taking any industrial action by Labor's anti-strike enterprise bargaining and Fair Work laws.

Yesterday, NTEU general secretary Damien Cahill sent a misleading email to all NTEU members nationally claiming that staff at WSU, as well as Newcastle and Adelaide universities, had "overwhelmingly voted to approve new enterprise agreements that lift the standards for our sector." He stated that the WSU agreements included "strong pay rises."

For decades, the NTEU and CPSU have imposed one EA after another in the universities, cutting wages in real terms, driving up workloads and assisting restructuring. Funding per student has been slashed from around $32,000 in 1974 to some $12,000—a cut of about two-thirds.

This has not only affected all staff members but also the students—left with larger classes, higher fees, narrower study options, less educational support, fewer services and greater restrictions on free speech.

Like every other trade union, the NTEU and CPSU have been transformed into arms of management, especially since the prices and incomes Accords with the Hawke and Keating Labor governments of the 1980s and 1990s.

That is why university workers and students have to build new genuine democratic forms of organisation—rank-and-file committees, totally independent of the corporatist trade unions.

Under its Universities Accord, the Albanese government is restructuring universities in line with its designated national priorities, which feature the AUKUS military pact against China and other war-related industries, such as critical minerals.

The Accord proposes to tie university funding to "mission-based compacts" based on how well universities serve the "national priorities."

At the same time, the Labor government is starving the universities of adequate funding, along with public schools, public hospitals, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and other social programs, while allocating hundreds of billions of dollars for AUKUS and other military weaponry.

That is the real content and context of the efforts of the trade unions to ram through new EAs, which will facilitate Labor's restructuring and cement their collaboration with the government and managements in enforcing this agenda.

Governments internationally—from Trump's fascistic administration to those in Europe and Japan—are militarising their economies amid the interconnected US-backed Gaza genocide, the US-NATO war against Russia and the US aggression in the Middle East, as the US ruling class desperately seeks to reverse the decline in its dominant global position since World War II.

Rank-and-file committees (RFCs) in the universities and schools will reach out, throughout the working class, for a collective struggle against this agenda of war and austerity, and link their struggles with those of workers worldwide through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

RFCs are developing and fighting for demands based on the needs of working people and society as a whole, not the dictates of capitalist governments and the corporate ruling class.

At WSU, we advanced demands such as 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.

As we said in our statement calling for a no vote, we recognise that such demands can be won only as part of a broader international struggle for democratic working-class control to reorganise society along socialist lines in the interests of humanity, not the billionaire oligarchs and the war machines.

To discuss how to join the WSU RFC or form an RFC at your university or school, please contact the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the educators' rank-and-file network:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation
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To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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