

Responding to the new attacks of 2024



Now that the strike campaign has wrapped up, we enter a longer phase of unionism at USYD. This brings new challenges as we face more attacks in 2024. How we respond will determine the health of our union.

On campus, management hasn't stopped dreaming up new offensives and continuing with old ones. The "Academic Excellence Framework" threatens new performance management for academics. Management's intransigence on wage theft has not been blunted by its criminalisation. The steady drip of change plans continues unabated.

This is not going unchallenged. All across the university, unionists are fighting management fires. Unionists have successfully got forced redundancies ruled out in the latest library restructure (see report on back page), and we've had an instructive victory about unpaid participation marking and student consultation for tutors in a business school unit. We need to pay attention to and generalise our wins across this large and varied institution.

While many staff have taken a holiday, world events have not. More brutalities in Palestine are reported every day. Palestinian trade unions are calling for unionists around the world to take action, and we're constantly discovering more of USYD's links with Israel and the US military (see centrefold). Nobody can be neutral in a political catastrophe where our own government and workplace are complicit. With geopolitical pressures building across the world, and the possibility of Trump term 2, unions are going to need to get used to taking anti-imperialist work more seriously.

Whether it's genocide overseas or wage theft and restructures here at work, we need a fighting union more than ever. We cannot have too many people getting involved, so please get in touch if you'd like to help up the union ante.



Photo: Unionists fly the flag for Palestine demanding a ceasefire over Parramatta Road.

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Faced with the Gaza genocide, End University of Sydney links with the global arms trade

Nick Riemer and Markela Panegyres

In the face of Israel's vicious ongoing annihilation of Palestinian life in Gaza, we can only be sickened and deeply outraged. Australia has sent \$13m of arms exports to Israel over the last five years. There is every likelihood that Palestinians are currently being murdered using technology developed in this country.

With the university system in Gaza completely destroyed, Palestinian academics and their students have directly appealed to their international colleagues not to be silent about genocide. No one can be deaf to students like Israa Hmaid, a second-year nursing student at Al-Israa university in Gaza, which was destroyed by Israel in January (video). Following this attack, Israa has said that 'a new question was added to the questions haunting me since the start of war: where will we study? It will be added to other[s] like: where will we live? How will we eat and drink?'

The principle that a university should not be involved in enabling genocide is so obvious as to not require any argument. What is happening in Gaza is an affront to every value we claim to hold. As university staff, we have a responsibility to ensure that the institution to which we belong, and over which we therefore have some influence, is not complicit with the slaughter. Unfortunately, there is little doubt that the university's connections with the global arms industry give it a share of responsibility for the crimes being committed in Gaza. The recent ICJ ruling that Israel's attack is plausibly genocidal

should be taken seriously by our management because of the implication that University of Sydney's connections with Israel and arms industry constitute complicity with genocide according to international law. In order for our university to discharge its stated commitments to education and global peace, these connections must be ended immediately.

What partnerships does the university have with the military-industrial complex?

We still don't know full extent of the University of Sydney's ties to the global arms industry. But given Australia's recent commitment to significantly increase its share of global arms exports and the enthusiastic response from Australian universities to the AUKUS alliance, these ties are only set to increase. The university's most recently announced partnership, dating from November last year, is with the global weapons and military hardware manufacturer Safran, which collaborates with the Israeli weapons company Rafael. The US Office of Naval Research, the US Army Research Office Laboratory for Physical Sciences, the US Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity, and Lockheed Martin all fund research in chemistry and physics. A Linkage project is currently underway with the 'defence' contractor L3Harris and the Defence Science Technology Group.

The university has received millions of dollars in grant funding from the Australia-US International Multidisciplinary University Research Initiative (AUSMURI)-- a partnership between the US Department of Defense and Australia's Department of Defence. AUSMURI funds the university's research into additive manufacturing (3D printing) and nano-architected

materials. Disturbingly, the Australian government's own website makes it clear that any research receiving AUSMURI grants must be directly on a topic designated by the US military. Other collaborations are likely to exist.

The university's special relationship with Thales

University management has a longstanding association with the multinational weapons systems manufacturer Thales, which describes itself as doing 'whatever it takes' to help its



Photo: The ceremonial flag raising in solidarity with Palestine in December last year, which received international reporting in the Middle East Eye.

customers 'achieve and maintain security, tactical superiority and strategic independence in the face of any type of threat'. Thales collaborates in drone-production with Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems; its stock price rose sharply following the start of the Israeli genocide in October 2023. In Australia, Thales is involved in the development and production of munitions, missiles, rocket motors, propellant and military explosives.

Thales directly funds PhD programs at the university in the areas of Aerospace, Mechanical and Mechatronic Engineering, and Electrical and Information Engineering. It sponsors eight Engineering Sydney Industry placements. An extension to the university's existing collaboration was signed in 2022, which will see the university and Thales 'embed' staff in each other's organisations. Thales also collaborates with researchers at the university's Australian Robotic Inspection and Asset Management Hub (ARIAM), and at other organisations in which the university is a partner, like the Trusted Autonomous Systems Defence Cooperative Research Centre.

The university's connections with Thales go to the highest level. The university's chancellor, Belinda Hutchinson, is a board member of Thales, and was head of the Australian arm of the organisation from 2015-2023. Another university appointee, former federal parliamentarian, and Visiting Fellow at the United States Studies Centre, is chair of Thales' advisory board.

What should happen?

Science should serve the cause of peace and human progress, not fuel the arms race by inventing continually more sophisticated means of death and destruction. Weapons development is a perverse misdirection of the knowledge of our researchers and their students, and a shocking waste of their talents. These should be directed into making the world a better place, not into collaboration with profiteering weapons manufacturers.

University management should:

- Urgently conduct an audit of all the university's partnerships with the 'defence' industry and militaries, and make the results public. All such partnerships should be ended
- Immediately cut ties with Thales and other weapons manufacturers. Last year, RMIT ended its collaboration with the Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems. Sydney University should do the same with Thales. No one needs to lose their job: the university is more than rich enough to continue to employ current staff without funding from weapons makers
- Require the Chancellor, Mr Loosley, and any other staff on the boards of weapons companies, to give up their position either with the company or with the university. There is no place for the arms trade on our campus.

The University of Sydney must not be complicit with the horror in Gaza, or with any of the militarism that disfigures the world.

Business School Wage Theft Win

Sophie Cotton

Early in 2024, the NTEU finalised a victory in a business school unit over wage theft for casuals. A particular unit coordinator was trying to force more and more work out of tutors, telling tutors to use their tutorial preparation time for a variety of tasks including hour long student consults and onerous participation marking, as well as threatening that their marking work would be tracked using the dystopian "Cadmus" software. The tutors were worried about the repercussions of individually standing up to the mounting list of demands, so ended up meeting digitally and collectively joining the NTEU. Union reps were able to meet with local management on their behalf, and we can now report a full victory. Tutors are now being paid the full hourly rate for student consultation, 10 minutes per tutorial for grading participation, plus an additional 20 minutes where tutors are required to provide

written feedback. Cadmus is also not to be used for tracking tutors (though unfortunately the trial usage of the software for tracking students continued throughout the semester). **When the unpaid work starts to pile up, it's worth joining the union, organising and fighting.**

Elsewhere in the uni, maths tutors are now no longer being forced to reply to online forums unpaid (this form of wage theft was also occurring due to being told to repurpose their tutorial preparation hours). And the painfully slow internal dispute over extensive wage theft in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences is set to come to a head this semester, potentially being taken to the Fair Work Commission. We need to be prepared to mobilise for any union rallies to bring a victory in this critical dispute.

[Another] Library Restructure

Nick T

The University Library is undergoing its 3rd restructure in 10 years. Which gives us the dubious honour of being the most frequently restructured unit at USyd.

In a PR coup, management commenced preliminary consultation shortly before last year's Christmas shutdown. No straightforward account was given for what motivated it. Management repeatedly mentioned USyd's purported below-average 'student experience' as a key motivator. The biggest actual student experience issues we see are busted dunnies, manky study spaces, bodgy printing, broken equipment and overcrowding. A Library restructure can't fix these problems.

Fast-fwd to the beginning of February, when we were given a day's notice of a 30 minute webinar announcing a draft change plan. The plan looks suspiciously similar to the 'straw man' structure management presented to 'stimulate discussion' a few months before.

But with one important concession— no-forced redundancies for ongoing staff (the position of fixed-term staff remains insecure). This win was a direct result of staff speaking out about disastrous costs to health and morale the last large-scale restructure produced. Staff reluctantly revisited the spectre of the last University Librarian, with her penchant for dispensable student labour, and disturbing habit of displaying Library union bulletins as trophies on her office wall.

Job security is one thing. But what about the sorts of jobs we'll have? HEO3 roles will be phased out entirely, with no indication of who'll absorb this work. Some staff will either have to compete for a severely reduced number of popular back-of-house jobs, or be forced into 'student engagement', including working



highly problematic 'open concierge' service points. They'll be taken off jobs they enjoy and are good at, and which still need doing. To say nothing of mapped roles that look radically different to their predecessors, and other PDs that could do with significant re-jigging by staff with experience – and a stake – in them.

The change plan has over 400 pages of accompanying documentation, and dropped at a time when staff are flat chat preparing for the year ahead. So far unions have won extra consultation sessions, and are pressing for an extension time for feedback. Staff aren't unilaterally opposed to workplace change, but want to drive it, and don't want it at the expense of their skills base and job satisfaction. Time and again we've shown that the best way to win – be it with backpay claims, the defeat of uniforms and retention of staff amenities – is by openly campaigning, and making ourselves inconvenient. This can't be counterposed to the bureaucratic routine of pursuing our EBA rights, but it will be necessary to ensure those rights are respected.

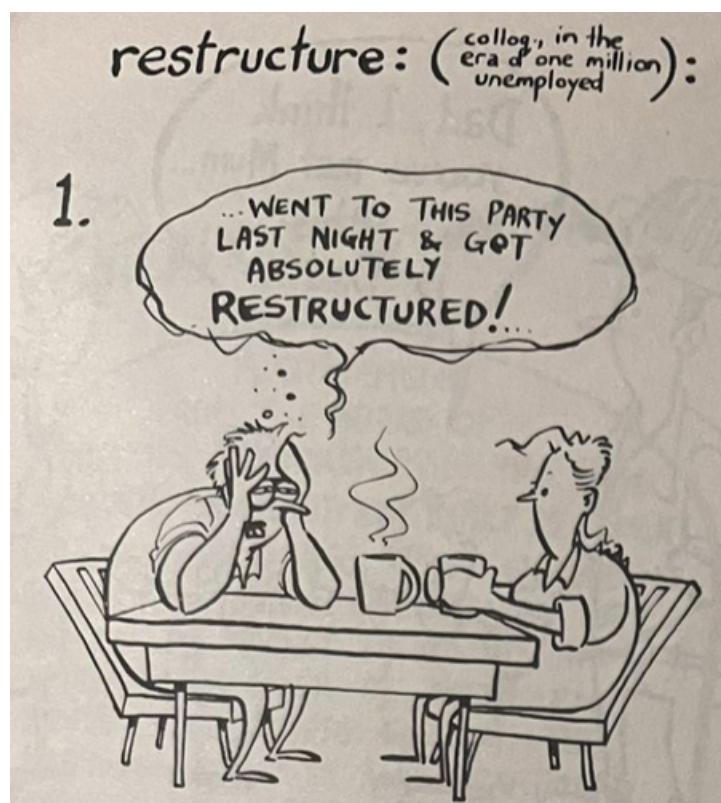


Image: Early cartoon by David Pope on 'restructure' double speak



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