



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SYDNEY



Communiques from the Campus: March - June 2013

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# A QUICK GUIDE TO STRIKE SOLIDARITY

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I really feel for the staff who are on strike, but I still need to go to uni to work and study on the strike day.



OOPS! NOW YOU'RE A

## SCAB

One day without work and class is a small price to pay for supporting staff, so I'm planning to not cross the picket.



OMG! SHE GETS IT! WHAT A

## CHAMPION!

# USYD ON STRIKE

A strike has been called at the University of Sydney for Thursday the 7th of March. Many of us have never been involved in a strike and may not even know what a union is, but many of the academics, general staff and students are sick of the abuses of management.

## We are many, but we feel alone

We, as students, often don't realize the extent of the stress and despair that these moves by management creates because staff don't usually speak out about it. They may feel a need to keep quiet so as to not endanger their jobs or seem vulnerable (many being unprotected as casual or contract personnel) in a culture of isolation and inaction. If some staff and students are not interested in this industrial action, it is because the existing structures within the university make it hard for us to connect and discuss our working and studying conditions openly.

## Not an isolated issue - austerity hits USYD

Using the excuse of 'fiscal responsibility', the management of Sydney University has been attacking the conditions of their staff aggressively, whilst spending exorbitant amounts on their salaries and new buildings to ensure a dubious ranking is attributed to the university. The current strike is not only about the actions of management today. It is not just about the current bargaining; it is not only about pay, as Michael Spence would have you believe, but the deliberate attack on conditions that has been executed by the university in the last few years. It is a fight for secure work, conditions such as personal leave and the small amount of consultation with workers expected from management that is methodically being diminished.

This industrial action represents the frustration of being ignored in past disputes with management. For instance, workers and student action, although defiant, couldn't save all their colleagues from being sacked last year. It is a product of the indignation at the arrogance and intransigence of management, a management that now asks for your support, making you complicit in this process of screwing over workers, which one day you'll be. If you can't be bothered to support them now, why do you think it will be different in the future when its your life, your job on the line?

We inherit the conditions of the workers before us. Picket lines will be formed on Thursday to stand against the abuses of management. Don't be fooled into believing that you are impartial by being guilted into attending class. No-one ever fails a subject by missing one class.

You are a part of this even though everything is arranged to make you feel as though you are not. You are important, you have the ability to change your immediate reality. A strike means the suspension of all work and if some continue working they undermine the efforts and risks taken by those who have chosen to take a stand. Stand with us, not management.

## SUPPORT THE STRIKERS!

These are all my reasons for crossing the picket lines.

Wow. You really have no idea how selfish you sound.



## DON'T CROSS THE PICKET!

## Anarchist intervention in the Sydney Uni Strike

In the early hours of March 7 some anarchists broke into the abandoned St Michaels College building on City rd on the Sydney Uni campus.



(For three months in 2011 this large abandoned space, renamed the "Chapel of the Insurrection" was liberated from the Catholic Church, their bullshit morality and their vast landholdings. Inside dozens of comrades, students, street youth and wage slaves experimented with new ways of living and found love, laughter and joy. Inside we built barricades and outside a large vegetable garden.)\*

For some of us it was our first time inside, while for others it was a happy return. After exploring the building and planning the day ahead, we dropped a massive banner off the roof which said:



"WE ARE THE UNI WE CAN SHUT IT DOWN. STAFF + STUDENT STRIKE"

A 12 hour strike had been called at Sydney Uni by the National Tertiary Education Union for Thursday March 7. It is the first strike at the Uni in over a decade and follows months of failed negotiations regarding the university's new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement, which proposes to cut staff wage and working conditions, sick leave entitlements, reduce job security and sideline the unions as bargaining agents for the staff.

The neoliberal assault is part of the federal Labor government's "education revolution", a project to explicitly corporatise education institutions by forcing them into ever more ferocious competition for research funding and student numbers. At universities around the country, academics and staff have been sacked, class sizes increased and working conditions undermined.

In the weeks preceding March 7, dozens of anarchist students, staff and supporters heavily promoted the strike by plastering the campus and the surrounding areas in strike posters, stickers, chalk and graffiti slogans.

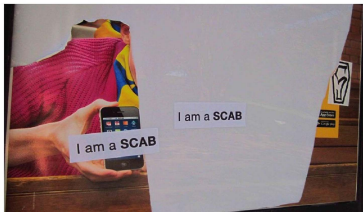


While the university attempted to counter the strike by calling on all students and staff to attend classes, some of us designed a poster that appeared to be an official University documents which declared the uni would be closed on March 7, and plastered it everywhere.

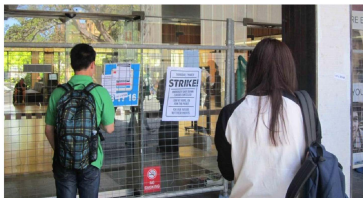




Not content with merely picketing, some crews of anarchists roamed the uni, specifically targeting the libraries and lectures and managed to convince a number of students to leave the campus grounds and join the pickets. Over a dozen lectures were disrupted and the scab lecturers abused and called out for being the rotten scabs they are. Stickers reading "I AM A SCAB" were stuck on the doors of various professors and academic staff that chose to cross picket lines.



Starting at 7am, picket lines were set up at all seven entrances to the university with varying degrees of militancy. Pickets with a large number of union officials were most eager to simply hand out leaflets and let students and scabs through (after making an agreement with management that pickets would not block anyone), while pickets with more anarchists and militant unionists made it clear to everyone, particularly scabs that the uni was closed, and barricaded entrances with linked arms and large banners reading "STRIKE" "NO CLASS: CLASS WAR" and another reading "SPENCE: THE ONLY CUT WE NEED (featuring a caricature of the vice-chancellor, Michael Spence and two guillotines)"



Corporate ads were vandalised, metal fencing was dragged across campus from a nearby construction site and used to blockade the library entrances and two banners were hung from the Parramatta rd footbridge entrance reading: "STRIKE OCCUPY TAKE OVER" and "STAB A SCAB CUT THE COPS"





In the afternoon, there was a march of 1000 staff and students through the university grounds chanting "one struggle, one fight, staff and students strike!" While various union bureaucrats and politicians made speeches, more militant strikers and supporters chanted "NO CLASS, CLASS WAR!"



Unsurprisingly there were union bureaucrats who angrily opposed the actions of militants and some collaborationist NTEU officials made vocal condemnations such as "You're ruining this for everyone." Some unionists even colluded with police to untie and remove the banner hung off the footbridge reading: "STAB A SCAB, CUT THE COPS."



Throughout the strike, the NTEU made clear its determination to block any political struggle against the Federal Labor government and to channel all anger into a campaign purely for the preservation of the union's status, as the sole facilitator of management dictates.

NTEU speakers made no mention of the Labor government's current assault on working conditions (carried out with the backing of the Greens) and even invited Labor Senator Doug Cameron (a member of the very government implementing these attacks) and Greens' senator Lee Rhiannon to address the rally. Its decision to give them a platform is a signal to management that the union will continue to collaborate with cuts to the conditions of its members, provided its position is preserved.

Doug Cameron even declared that their "wages, conditions, and career prospects" were only "short term issues" and that the major question in the strike was management's "attack on trade unionism". He concluded his demagogic speech by imploring all staff to join the union.

The various Leninist sects which dominate the so-called "rank-and-file" Education Action Group at USYD, including Socialist Alternative, Socialist Alliance, and Solidarity, all lined up in support of the NTEU's position.

We actively participated in this strike, not to merely support the demands of union bureaucrats but for our collective liberation against the neoliberal policies imposed on our lives. We will not reduce our dreams to the parameters set by a unionist struggle for mere concessions; we will make no demands of Spence or his administration.

Demands are always too big or too small, too unrealistic or too rational, we have no interest in playing their game of negotiations. We recognise this strike, like any strike, as a potential moment of rupture with capitalist normality, a moment of class antagonism,

where people faced with a picket line are forced to take a side.

Many of us study at this degree factory; as we have no interest in taking classes from scabs, we will unapologetically call them out for what they are.

Some of us had hope in the fledgling movement of students opposed to university cuts last year. There were a number of occupations which culminated in a 1500 strong demonstration of staff and students to the Chancellery, which resulted in a failed occupation, a confrontation with police, three arrests, and apparently one broken arm on the side of the pigs. While there was much passion and determination in this movement, energy soon petered out as holidays then exam time came, and the much discussed student strike never came to be.

We encourage strikes and pickets at every workplace, everyday. Whenever they occur we seek to strengthen them, not simply to increase the likelihood that union demands will be met, but to foster class antagonism and more militant responses to neoliberal assaults. A 48 hour strike has been called for March 26-27 at USYD, where we intend to make our presence felt and do whatever we can to disrupt the functioning of the uni.

Our fight is for control of the university, not for control of the mechanism of the degree factory but for their abolition. We are in struggle to take over the physical space of the university, not just for the use of the relatively privileged staff and students, but to transform it into a communal space for all. We wish to establish a physical territory liberated from cops and commerce, a free space from which to wage attacks on the institutions and representatives of capital that surround it.

While some may mock this goal as unrealistic, we see it a mere first step.

A free university under capitalism is like a reading room in a prison. We seek the complete destruction of capitalism and every social relationship that facilitates its reproduction. The university is a fundamental mechanism of the capitalist project, every year it produces qualified and disciplined workers for the mining, law and finance industries which suffocate our ability to live.

As Carlo Pisane eloquently stated in 1857 "We will not be free when we are educated, we will be educated when we are free." The abolition of the university is only a first step toward the abolition of capital.

As inspiration we look to the student rebels from France to Chile, Greece to Montreal who have made their campuses largely unsafe for police to venture. Using a variety of militant tactics including the barricading of major roads, these young comrades have managed to consistently disrupt (if only temporarily) the daily flow of commodities and create living alternatives to the life of wage slavery that is offered to us.

Fuck their degrees, decrees and masters, and everything their world has to offer.

We want nothing less than everything.

\*On September 16 2011, after the church broke off negotiations and had all utilities cut, about a hundred riot police invaded the uni grounds, shutting down half of the campus for an entire day. After an 8 hour eviction, seven squatters were arrested and charged.



# Strike! To the Picket Lines at Sydney University

The NTEU and the CPSU at Sydney University have called a strike campaign in response to the outrageous position of management in EBA negotiations. What follows is a recount of some of my experiences with the first strike day. This article is written from the experience of a student, I make no claim to speak to experience of staff at the pickets.

The strike on the 7th of March was big. It shut down the university. There were probably five hundred or more on all of the pickets. Management were upset. From these perspectives, it was a success.

On the footbridge across Parramatta road, militants linked arms and sang songs, waved red and black flags and turned around many. Outside the law school, a small band of militants talked to drivers in cars, moving aside only reluctantly when the drivers made the choice to scab. Eventually the cops chose to block off the entrance themselves, declaring that the banked up traffic was dangerous.

On the footbridge over city road, students held a banner, linked arms, shouted through a megaphone and would not move. Disgracefully many received minor injuries at the hands of scabs and strike-breakers who chose to charge the line rather than finding another entrance.

Each of these pickets was a victory in itself, and defied the rules handed down by management and the cops. We asserted our absolute right, as the people who run this university, to control the campus. At the rally afterwards, anarchist and libertarian militants chanted "no class, class war." Many students who I had previously picked for liberals joined in enthusiastically, it's clear that class consciousness was almost unbelievably high.

In a sense, a strike is the most polarising of all actions. A line of people is created, and workers choose which side of the line they

want to stand on; politics are made physically manifest. Sadly though, not everyone on the right side of the line was in full solidarity. We would not ask for unconditional support but there was an astonishing lack of solidarity on the day from some quarters.

A friend of mine was assaulted by a strikebreaker, who charged his picket. I screamed and swore at the scab, as I think is pretty natural and fitting. Later that day I was approached by an authoritarian socialist who said there had been a bit of a "commotion" at my picket, and could I tell her anything about it. Somehow she managed to both glare and look smug at the same time, (I think it must be something they learn in party school). I told her what had happened and she said "mmmmmm" like the headmaster from an American high school film peering over her glasses and addressing a naughty pupil.

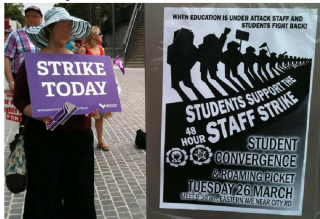
It's important that the differences among student organisers not be made to seem more severe than they are. I do not disagree with Solidarity, for example, that we must form a political line as well as a physical line around the campus. We need to do more work to persuade students of our case in preparation for further strike days. Though we ran an extensive campaign telling students and staff that the 7th of March would be a strike day, I don't believe we did anywhere near enough to articulate why we were going on strike and what that meant.

I recently was speaking to a member of the philosophy department. She told me that we should do more to publicise the NTEU's log of claims, yes, but that this wouldn't be enough in itself. She said that we need to articulate a vision of how we think the university should be run, to oppose the vision of the management. I agree and I think it's one of the most insightful things that's been said thus far about the campaign. We need to articulate our politics generously, to not merely steer people away from campus, but to tempt them to the picket lines.

In Love & Rage  
T.S.



## Militancy and collaboration at the USyd Strike



Tuesday March 26 marked the beginning of a 48 hour strike at Sydney university. The strike was called by the NTEU with CPSU support as a continuation of the struggle against the uni administrations new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement, intended to undercut staff conditions, increase casualisation, micromanagement and surveillance under the familiar guise of "flexibility". In the early hours of March 26, some anarchists once again broke into the City rd Catholic college (or chapel of the Insurrection) and again dropped a massive banner reading: WE ARE THE UNI WE CAN SHUT IT DOWN STAFF + STUDENTS STRIKE

At 6.45am we joined hundreds of staff, students and socialists in picketing and barricading seven different entrances to the uni.

Early in the morning a contingent of riot police attempted to break a picket at the city rd car park entrance. After a brief scuffle in which the picketers managed to hold their ground, the riot pigs retreated in humiliation.



Meanwhile the Parramatta rd footbridge was barricaded by anti-authoritarians who soon came into conflict with NTEU officials who collaborated with police to break the picket to allow scabs and students to pass. Militant picketers were told by NTEU bureaucrats that they had to let scabs pass or "the union could be fined for illegal activity"

From 9am on, some crews of anarchists roamed the uni in a series of roving noise pickets, passing out hundreds of anti-cop and anti-scab leaflets, writing messages on uni walls and disrupting lectures, libraries and businesses. Any commercial operation within the uni territory was fair game. We banged pots, drums, shouted at scabs and chanted against classes, cops and capital. Anyone on campus studying, working in an office, coffee shop or lecturing was acting as a strike breaker and we made sure to inform them what this meant. We aimed to disrupt any semblance of normality on the uni grounds, to assert our right to this territory against the claims of capitalists like Michael Spence and his riot pigs.

Some members of the socialist sects (who noticed the effectiveness of the roaming pickets) then marched a large contingent of students into a chemistry lecture, though rather than shouting insults at the scab and passing leaflets to students then leaving, they decided to occupy the hall and make long speeches to the chemistry students. The police soon mobilised the riot squad which burst into the lecture hall, violently dragging out picketers and arresting two of them. A crowd of angry students and anti-authoritarians then confronted police chanting "COPS OFF CAMPUS" and "NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE, FUCK THE POLICE!" Police responded by violently pushing and dragging the crowd out the building.

respond because of the massive number of students involved. As usual, members of trotskyst sects, alarmed by an action they had not promoted and were not directing, began using their megaphones to implore the crowd to leave the road. When this was at first unsuccessful, they resorted to a familiar tactic of theirs and called for a vote on whether people wanted to hold the street. As always these Leninist are only capable of draining energy and initiative from any moment of actual class conflict. While anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists continued to push for generalised disruptions across campus, the Trotskyite politicians successfully managed to disperse the large angry crowd of students with their repetitive and boring speeches that no one ever wants to hear.



With riot police encircling the dwindling crowd, clearly waiting for a small group to cause any disruption that could be used as a pretext for arrests, most militant activists decided to leave the uni to make another noise demo outside the cop shop in solidarity with the arrestees.

Police denied both comrades bail and vindictively delayed their processing till after courts closed and held them overnight. The following day over 20 people showed up at the court in solidarity and welcomed the comrades back to relative freedom on their release.

The neoliberal restructuring of the economy toward the privatisation, casualisation and

generalised precarity of employment (in the interest of a narrow class of professionals) can only be enforced with batons, tasers and prison cells. The militarisation of police and the privatisation of our lives are merely two sides of a process of exclusion and exploitation. As students and workers we are hit first by higher fees, debt, casualisation and layoffs, then by police violence if we take a stand.

To take control of our destinies we cannot rely on those individuals and organisations who position themselves as our representatives. While we are willing to work with unions and student associations when it is necessary, we do not recognise their authority. We must act on our own behalf directly, without the mediation of organisers or spokespeople. We must break with any groups that seek to limit the struggle by telling us to leave the street, go back to work or class, to negotiate, to reconcile.

As an alternative to being herded by representatives, we call on students and workers to organise themselves collectively outside the structures of political parties or unions. We urge undergraduates, lecturers, service workers and staff to begin meeting together to discuss their situation. The more we begin talking to one another and finding our common interests, the more difficult it becomes for the administration and police to pit us against each other. To intensify our resistance, our immediate task is to create spaces of solidarity, care and freedom, where we can find one another to conspire against the conditions imposed on us by capital.

Occupations can liberate common spaces, negate existing property relations and assert the collective desire for that which is shared. We must physically expel the police and the administration from the territory of Usyd in order to create a free, open and communal university of resistance.

TOWARD THE SYDNEY UNI COMMUNE

# Open letter: whose university is University of Sydney?

Hi.

I am one of the community members arrested at the first day of the 48 hours strike of the University of Sydney workers. I am now indefinitely banned by a university board from the university, after closely filming the assaults against my friends and others in the community who participated in the strike, and being arrested and assaulted myself by police. This is not an allegation, it is a truth.

The questions I want to ask are:

1. Who should be involved in making decisions about who can and who can't be at a public university? I am not the only one who had such a notice handed to me while being held in a police cell at Newtown. Who is happy about leaving such decisions to a board, and why? Globally, it is common practice and result of grassroots struggles, for cops to be banned from campus (such universities are called autonomous universities, there are lots around), instead of sitting back and accepting when dissenters and observers are banned. Cops have been granted the role of deciding arbitrarily when dissent has 'gone too far', it is important to question that.

2. Who should be involved in making decisions about working conditions of the educators and those that work to support this education system? The strike is about working conditions, and not sitting back and accepting as 'given' whatever is decided top-down, that only has profit and neoliberal interests behind the decisions.

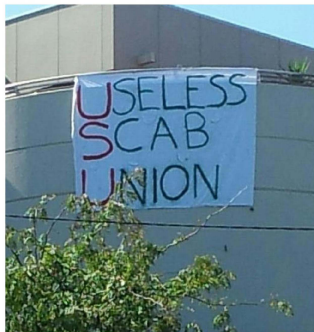
Ultimately, it's worth looking at the whole education system, of top-down decision making by some board, instead of people actively shaping our education. It shouldn't be impossible nor utopian, to imagine debating how to change the way we participate in education. To have grassroots debates leading to transformations. Debates-driven-transformations to education, that liberate us, help us grow, to dream and create the futures we want. Education without the constraints of ways we have known of how education works, that have been imposed for so long as to stop us from thinking of other ways. Imagine education that gives the space for us to see and critically act about the status quo, instead of reinforcing it. This would be an education shaped by a democracy that is participative.

There are things we can do to create and spark participative democracy, take ownership of things that we are part of. Question and question, visualise and visualise, and share. Reflect. I am part of this university community and in relation to the ban, I emphasise that there is no process or space of community discussion behind this decision, of who is and who is not welcome on campus.



WHOSE UNIVERSITY?  
OUR UNIVERSITY!

## Useless Scab Union advises staff how to break picket lines



In a letter the USU CEO, Andrew Woodward, sent to USU retail staff on the 20th of March, he details the best methods of breaking the picket line during the 48hr strike on the 26th and 27th of March.

Interestingly, the language used by Woodward bears many similarities to the letter sent to students by the Vice Chancellor, including identical sentences, such as "we suggest that you stop, listen and then politely proceed to enter the campus".

The USU Board voted down resolutions to shut down Union outlet during strikes and give discounts/food vouchers to striking staff.

A representative of the USU released a statement saying the letter was sent as a legal obligation of the CEO, as an employer, to his staff.

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) branch president said he was frustrated by the USU's response.

"It appears that the managers of the USU were instructing or encouraging staff not to support our struggle," said Thompson, who

was based at the City Road entrance picket line on Tuesday afternoon.

"Given the USU is a university community organisation, one would think and one would hope for better than that."

Support from the USU on the picket lines was noticeably absent, complained a Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) member.

It is understood that the USU board, governed by 12 current and former students of the university, passed a motion to support the staff strike in principle, at a meeting last month. Two separate motions - to close the commercial operation of the union during the industrial action and provide food vouchers to the picket line - were voted down.

Members of the student-led union responded in exasperation to the letter.

"People are frustrated that a student-based nominally student-run institution is choosing not to get involved in the fight for student and teacher's rights," wrote a USU member and political economy student at the university.

## 2013 USU BOARD ELECTIONS

### AN EXERCISE IN FUTILITY



UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY UNION

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# NO APOLOGIES NO REGRETS

## Industrial action in USYD and beyond

The actions of the last strikes shocked some people. They went beyond the polite pattern of protest in the university. Many people wanted an argument coherent to their liberal sensibilities of freedom of choice promoted in the neo-liberal orthodoxy. We are expected to maintain a polite relativism but there is nothing polite about the impositions of management and the effects they have on the lives of people that work with us everyday.

If we are as critical and intelligent as we believe ourselves to be, why do students and staff get their ideas about what is happening in the university out of the bullshit, misrepresentations and glib summaries from the privileged, self-interested and those completely removed from what they're talking about? Yes, this includes Honi, the emails from USYD management, student commentators and any other organisation or individual that claims to understand or represent the whole or 'true' situation. We are not some homogenous mass - we aren't only students, staff, socialists, anarchists or 'fly-ins'. And even if we do identify with these labels, we are more than them. We are diverse and complex and we disagree amongst ourselves. If we don't have the time to think or talk about this shit, without all these mediators, classifications and generalisations, how are we going to change things?

I am not at university to make an 'investment' in my 'me first' future prospects - to make an economic transaction. I am here to learn some theory, yes, but also to create social relations upon which I can realize my existence to the fullest of my ability and to conceive with others a future beyond the pressing limitations of contemporary society.

I don't care if you're completing your PhD, if you study medicine, or if you get upset and write an angry article; you are not above other students and staff that care and take part in the conflicts of the university. Nor can you choose to be neutral in the debate and 'just want to learn'. Your actions have power and you either undermine workers by crossing pickets or you don't and if you do, you are a scab. People sacrificed their wages and time; they put their career and their freedom in jeopardy to guard the hard-won conditions fought for by others in the past; rights you enjoy today and will probably not complain about in the future. And if you did not know, you know now.

Wide participation in this debate is needed but it can't be wrapped in some sexy/hipster/feel-good packaging for people to consume; it cannot be commodified with wristbands. It cannot be another product in the aisle of convictions, campaigns and causes if it is to be an honest process that sets the basis for a community that creates and liberates knowledge instead of being a space for the spectators and consumers of its marketisation.



# Police are designed to destroy thinking

*The ignominy of such an authority [as police], which is felt by few simply because its ordinances suffice only seldom for the crudest acts, but are therefore allowed to rampage all the more blindly in the most vulnerable areas and against thinkers, from whom the state is not protected by law – this ignominy lies in the fact that in this authority the separation of lawmaking and law-preserving violence is suspended.*

...  
*And though the police may, in particulars, everywhere appear the same, it cannot finally be denied that their spirit is less devastating where they represent, in absolute monarchy, the power of a ruler in which legislative and executive supremacy are united, than in democracies where their existence, elevated by no such relation, bears witness to the greatest conceivable degeneration of violence.*

Walter Benjamin, Critique of Violence, 1921

While this passage was penned by Benjamin in the context of Germany's fated Weimar Republic the analysis still holds true today, particularly in the context of the current industrial dispute underway at the University of Sydney. A concerning development during this struggle has been the growing presence of police on the university campus.

The impact of this trend has been most obviously demonstrated in the violent arrests of several students and community

members, which occurred as a consequence of an intervention by the notorious riot police during otherwise non-violent lecture disruption by student groups during the first day of the 48 hour strike. This is of course but one incident amongst many that have occurred since staff and students began their resistance.

The violence displayed in these cases is upsetting for many observers and traumatising for those who were arrested, and who are now forced to endure the arduous process of defending their charges in court. However, the presence of police on campus raises concerns of a much larger nature.

While the use of state violence at an industrial dispute is not unusual, the growing presence of police on the USyd campus touches precisely upon the concern raised by Benjamin. If there is indeed something worth defending in the idea of the university it is surely the cultivation of the kind of critical thinking that serves some idea of the 'common good'. Such thinking, by definition, must strive towards non-compliance with the injustices of the social *status quo*.

Policing, however, in the way that it embodies a relatively autonomous will to violently and arbitrarily suppress non-compliance – a practice that is essential to, not a derivation from, the functioning of a liberal, capitalistic democracy – represents the most radical antithesis to the kind of thinking that Benjamin was talking about – thinking which is vital not only to the university itself but the society it should be structured to serve.



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At this uni we get police to attack  
staff and students who resist  
management decisions

Find out more

# Notes from the Picketline

These are some notes on the issues surrounding the recent strike days at the University of Sydney - the institution where I work. I'm not so concerned with describing what happened at the strike as with some of the strategic questions about the situation at the university in the hope of creating some sort of ongoing, radical, worker and student collective action that might counter the neoliberal onslaught. I'm also not going to go into any detail about the crucial role of education in the Australian economy and what the neoliberal restructuring of higher education looks like, even if these are obviously part of the larger context surrounding all of this. Those articles have been written elsewhere. For the sake of some structure - so that it wouldn't just be a collection of random thoughts - I have divided this into three constituent parts: the workers; the unions; and the students.

*The workers themselves (often as members of, but not wholly reducible, to the bureaucratic unions that represent them)*

The university is a difficult site to describe as a workplace due to it covering such a broad range of activities and conditions under which those activities take place. From the academic work of teaching and research to all functions covered by general staff - from all types of admin work, to the libraries, to I.T., to groundskeeping and maintenance, to tradies - the disparate types of work and workers mean it is difficult to provide a cohesive picture of the university as a workplace. What can be said though, is the people who do work at here in all those varied roles retain the potential to shape not only their work conditions, but the very image of higher education at this institution.

The truth is that it was not these most recent moments of industrial action that drew a line in the sand between workers and management. In fact it is not even correct to describe the line in the sand in such a way. Whatever lines that exist have slowly been drawn over a number of years as the

university has moved ever onwards towards being a fully-fledged neoliberal institution. The division is between those who see this and realise the consequences of it on their working conditions and their education and those who support this drive by management - which undoubtedly includes some number of workers and students. Over a number of years, across all sectors we have seen an increasing casualisation and contracting out of positions, which in turn has led to less permanent staff having more work forced downwards on them. If any line in the sand has been drawn, it wasn't by the unions during this round of enterprise bargaining, but by management 18 months ago when it confidently announced the cutting of 350 jobs across all sectors of the university.

So firstly, what needs to be said, is that where I work people do recognise the 'big picture'. This is not just about basic conditions like leave and pay. Instead there has been increasingly angry talk of needing to 'take a stand' as workers, talk that reached its pinnacle about the time that those job losses were announced and that has been bubbling away ever since. Sentiments are openly being expressed about the eternal conflict between workers and management and now even moving towards larger critiques of corporate culture and neoliberal capitalism (and it might be worth mentioning here that I don't work in an academic department but as the lowest level of general staff in another part of the uni). Undoubtedly the move towards strike action in the last few months has been a contributing factor to these things coming out into the open.

As things have escalated in these last few months there has been a growing degree of involvement and ownership over these actions by ordinary workers - this was particularly evident between the first strike and the second one. Folk were taking on talking to colleagues and students, putting posters and other propaganda around the place and also having not so discreet conversations about who was likely to scab. I think people definitely attained a newfound sense of empowerment as workers through their involvement in these industrial actions. However, while I have mentioned that folk are

aware of the 'bigger picture' politics of all of this, I don't think this ownership extends to a perspective of ongoing strategy or 'the long game'. While they may take on smaller day to day union activities, they are more likely to leave longer term questions of strategy to the union bureaucracy. This is a problem of the state of class struggle in Australia for which the mainstream unions must take a hell of a lot of blame (more on this later).

So it is that, even as folk have become more outspoken and I think generally more empowered, they have channelled that in the main through the bureaucratic functioning of the NTEU or CPSU. This was most evident in the willingness to stick closely to union protocols (protocols that had not been discussed or decided upon by the membership) on the picket-line, even if the actions deemed acceptable in the protocols fell well short of what was required to truly close the university. This was also down to most people's lack of experience and confidence in a strike situation - this sort of industrial action is so demoralised in mainstream culture that folk had to contend with their own sense that they were doing something so drastic and confronting that they had to tread very carefully. This led to a general, though not absolute, timidity on the pickets from many workers.

Further to this, the picket-lines were not necessarily (except in a few minor cases) treated as spaces for enacting participatory democracy and so discussions about the purpose of the pickets were not carried out here. The most necessary one I could see, was a discussion about whether the pickets were there as a place to engage students and scabbing workers or to simply attempt to close the university. I think a lot of workers initially lent towards the first idea, but by the second day of the 48hour strike had recognised the people trying to enter then had generally made their decision. I consider it a positive that the strike action galvanised folk to the extent they had to make a call about where they stand.

There's no point naively assuming we can ultimately convince most people of our

stance by the force of reasoned argument. This is a flawed, liberal idea that all people will as individuals decide their political positions by weighing up a series of a pros and cons. Within this framework we are simply expected to accept the 'right' of this decision even if it is immediately undermining the collective conditions of others. My response is that we need to make the picket-line a collective show of workers' force, not in our capacity to win one-on-one individual arguments but by being immovable as a group so that people experience a totally different version of political practice that doesn't rely on the middle-class vision of 'polite debate'. A problem that generally goes unmentioned is that there are many different class positions occupied by union members at the uni - tenured academics and middle management tend not to have the same class interests as casual tutors, library assistants and building attendants - in fact many of them are happy to hark back to the 'glory days' when the uni was just a different type of elite institution. These contradictions do need to be drawn out so that the actions of workers aren't unduly influenced by those higher up in the employment chain, a factor that clearly should bear no relevance on the activities of a union.

From this summary of some of the key things I noticed amongst people I work with around these industrial actions, I would suggest that what clearly stands out is the need for encouraging workers to claim more ownership over struggles that are their own. This simply means that more spaces need to exist where discussions about conditions and strategy can take place. This needs to occur as an ongoing thing so that when moments of action do occur that galvanise people it will be these grassroots participatory structures that inform how we proceed. I have been inspired by the response of people I work with to the need to step up and take industrial action and actually participate in making it happen.

Unfortunately, I do not think that this will easily transfer into a more ongoing engagement and clearly once this period of struggle is over the union hierarchy will do everything as usual to ensure workers do return to a more docile state. So now is a time



to attempt to move forward on creating alternative spaces for this energy and momentum to cohere into other, less bureaucratic and more effective, forms of workplace organising.

*The unions (a messy tangle of bureaucracy)*

For years the unions on campus have done nothing to encourage workers to claim ownership and be active in making their union a real force of collective power. They have effectively become an intermediary between management and their members – structuring their activity around enterprise agreement bargaining and individual grievance resolution. No wonder most workers do not look at belonging to a union as a reflection of their collective will, but as a representative body that lobbies on their behalf. And it seems the bureaucratic hierarchy calling the shots has little interest in changing this situation. Members meetings serve not as democratic decision-making spaces, but as a room that rubber-stamps the motions of the executive. Even as recently as the announcement of the mass job cuts, the best the NTEU could come up with was a series of rallies where boring dignitaries postured and promised ‘a fight’. Despite mobilising many workers this failed to maintain any momentum due to completely failing to let those mobilised workers *be* the campaign. As usual this campaign belonged to the NTEU hierarchy and workers were encouraged merely to *support* it.

This crucial sense of ownership and empowerment is clearly a hard thing to pin down, but I think these are the key elements we are trying to foster to create a radical space of workplace organising. With all the problems the unions pose it would seemingly be preferable to create such a space free from their machinations. However, we do have to contend with the fact that at the university they are still where most workers look to when they are up for a fight. So we walk a fine line of making things happen autonomously while still being connected to the functioning of the union. The casuals group is a good example – having formed separately to the NTEU it has now come

under its wing with the resources on offer from the union being a solid reason. However, it now will have an ongoing struggle to retain its own decision-making capacity free from the dictates of the stifling union leadership that seem to have no good ideas of their own. The presence of two unions on campus (the CPSU and NTEU) who are often at best ambivalent to each other, at worst hostile (even if this period of industrial action has seen some thawing of relations), does present a space for us to focus the creation of autonomous spaces of organising. That is, something like the Worker Student Assembly doesn’t have to place itself as in opposition to the bureaucratic unions, but is a necessary space of encounter for general staff, academic staff and students on campus to contextualise the conditions they work or study under in terms of the experiences of others. It is place where a practice of non-bureaucratic, self-organisation can hopefully take hold to begin to create a culture that can overcome the stifling hierarchical processes of the unions.

*The students (still quite a few good ‘uns, but certainly not any sort of radical force)*

The sustained mythology of students as a potential radical force can be seen in the number of socialist groups that continue to make their presence on campus. But it seems entirely misplaced at an institution like Sydney University. Here the elite class position of many of the students is thick in the air. So, one material condition we have to face is that an education institution like Sydney University has always been about reproducing the upper and middle classes. And while it is not as much purely a domain of the privileged as it might have been in the past, the next material condition we have to face is that the experience of being a student has totally been changed by the effects of the neo-liberal program against higher education. As such we have a situation of students who have come to identify as consumers purchasing an education that is nothing more than a commodity – as witnessed by the number who crossed the picketline with the excuse that they had paid for the particular class they were going to.

The cluelessness of so many students – even those who made claims of supporting our ‘cause’ while breaking the pickets – about the significance of a strike and a picketline speaks to the decimation of any culture of class struggle and organising in Australia. However, due to their historical resonance as a political actor, the failure of students to really grasp this display of collective workers’ power

was particularly disappointing for many picketers. I think the situation can be read as a combination of two factors. One is that assertion of education as a commodity, a service to be paid for that in return the consumer will be provided with the qualifications to further their economic prospects (in theory). The university as an entire physical and social space seems to reinscribe these values and when added to the high cost of living in Sydney, results in a student body less able or willing to engage with their education and the university as a whole in a political way. So staff are merely seen as service providers which students have no affinity with. Apart from these material conditions there is also the ideological factor that I have already described. That is, the dominance of liberalism as *the* discourse of ‘progressive’ or ‘left’ issues means that an individual, identity-based formation of political action – that is at odds with the necessary collective presence of class struggle – is the framework through which many students view a cause to be fought for.

Having said all this, it still does seem that there is likely to be some degree of an ongoing radical student presence on campus. However, the degree that this presence is dominated by those who see their interests reflected in the dilettante politicking of the SRC will ensure that this section of student activists will have little resonance in wider struggle. In a similar – though not at all exact – way to the workers on campus, one thing that clearly stands out

## WE SUPPORT THE STRIKE BUT ...

*We're too self-centred to respect the picket*



is the need for an example of something more assertive and autonomous, something unhindered by bureaucratic factionalism. There have been a few small examples of these and the strikes themselves provided further opportunity. Originally the unions (the NTEU in particular) tried to constrain the possible actions of students to ‘supporting the workers on the pickets’, but at the 48 hour strike some students thankfully broke from this.

Entering the university – making a militant claim on those parts of the uni that were trying to act as if the strike was not occurring – to enact roving pickets was a positive step. However, even in these moments the dominance of certain organisations and self-appointed student ‘leaders’ that always sought control restrained the possibility of action.

At this point then, it does seem likely that any sort of radical momentum to arise from the university will come in the main from those who work in this sector (despite some of the difficulties I described earlier). That however, doesn’t mean student action should in any way be restricted to merely ‘supporting’ staff in what they do. Clearly, students have much more room to move – and simply are usually more inspired and creative – in terms of what sought of militancy they enact. This has the potential to change the landscape of political action at the university, but much like the workers they first have to free themselves from the bureaucratic machinations of the organisations that supposedly ‘represent’ them. It seems that students actually have far less to lose in doing this than any individual worker does.

### *A summary (in one sentence)*

It seems that the experiences of the strike lead to the obvious enough lesson (one that is unfortunately typically easier said than done): that breaking the stranglehold of tired, old bureaucracies and creating the spaces to practice autonomous, non-hierarchical self-organisation is the only thing worth attempting from here in terms of radical organising at Sydney University.

## Just How Flexible Are Casual Academics?



May 6: Flexibility is popular with university management – but for casual academics, it's code for employment insecurity.

Yesterday a group of casual staff at Sydney University showed just how “flexible” they can be by taking part in a yoga stunt outside a high-level executive meeting. Their message to management? Casuals are sick of being forced to bend over backwards in the name of “flexibility”.

When we practise yoga, we know that our strength, flexibility and energy comes from a solid foundation whether through our hands, our feet or the top of our head. Our foundation must be strong, and steady. Equally, true flexibility in the workplace must be based on a secure foundation of respect and equity in the employment relationship. Without such a foundation, flexibility becomes one more way to undermine workers' rights.

While flexibility has become a popular buzzword in corporate management, from the worker's perspective it is largely code for employment insecurity. University management uses the rhetoric of flexibility to shift the risk of fluctuating student numbers to staff. NTEU research published in

2012 found that since 1996, the use of casual workers to perform core teaching roles has increased by 81 per cent, with over half of all undergraduate teaching now done by casual academics.

Casuals provide flexibility to university managements because they are paid by the hour and can have their hours changed or cancelled at short notice. They are also cheap. They have no access to sick pay or holiday pay and they provide the university with massive cost savings by performing hours of unpaid labour. Casual academics are not paid extra for entering students' marks into electronic databases, for dealing with plagiarism or for high levels of email correspondence and student consultations. In addition, one casual told us: “Last semester, the department changed our pay system. Now we have to process our own time-sheets, which can take up to an hour each fortnight.”

Casual workers are also under pressure to perform unpaid labour in order to be considered for future employment. A PhD student reported: “I was ‘invited’ by my supervisor to give a lecture. There was no discussion about payment, it was just expected and I didn't feel comfortable to decline.” This is not about gaining teaching experience; it is free labour.

Less obvious, is that casual staff now directly subsidise the university by contributing to university research funding through their publication output. While casuals may only be paid for the hours they are teaching each week, they are also compelled to maintain their research track record in the hope of making it in the lotto that is the academic labour market.

But casual work gives employees the flexibility to balance work and family, right? While lines like this are regularly rolled out in defence of casual work, they don't hold up. There are a range of ways in which organisations can support employee work-life

balance. A secure job is at the top of the list. By contrast, no sick pay, no holiday pay and an incredibly unstable income is anathema to balancing work and personal life. While work may be increasingly “flexible”, expenses and commitments remain fixed.

As one casual academic says: “As far as I’m aware you can’t give birth to a fixed-term kid and you can’t contract to pay a rental lease or a mortgage for 13 weeks a year. This is not just about work worked in tiny parcels, this is about being asked to live small lives in tiny parcels — one 13 week contract at a time.”

Casuals also report struggling to find affordable childcare for when they go to work because semester breaks interrupt their income and they face losing their child’s place in childcare.

In addition, casuals are concerned with how much anxiety and stress their children are witnessing at home, as Jen puts it “my children are growing up with constant exposure to my job insecurity, frustration and sadness”. As Elias and Melanie (both in their early 40s) point out, a lack of secure work poses a challenge to having a family at all. Melanie and her partner had decided not to have children, arguing that it is “hard enough to manage your own lives with the type of work that we do to even think about having to manage someone else”. When Elias was asked about this plans for having a family, he too reports insecure work as a barrier — “I mean we haven’t discussed it. And I think the reason we haven’t discussed

it, about the timing, is because I don’t have an ongoing job...if I did get security, in some form – I think that would be the first conversation we would have... I don’t think [my partner] is willing to make that decision until I have ongoing work – she has actually said that.”

Conversely, Anne left academia once she had her daughter: “After nearly a decade of training it became a choice between my family and my job. The hours and income are unpredictable, plus if I got sick or my kids got sick I would lose my whole week’s income.”

The Casuals’ Network at Sydney University, like similar groups in universities around the country, is working with the unions to bargain for claims that will reduce casualisation and provide genuine pathways into academic careers. Flexibility doesn’t work if it is one-sided and unbalanced. As workers, our strength and power in the employment relationship comes through collective action. Flexible working arrangements must be negotiated collectively through our unions and must be grounded by job security.



#### **Raised arms**

So we can reach for more qualifications, more experience, more publications, more hours, in search of stable work.



#### **Eagle pose**

Our arms and legs wrapped in knots, trying to meet the university’s constantly changing requirements.



#### **One-legged tree pose**

Practice finding balance in a life of unstable work.



#### **Wheel pose**

Because casual staff are expected to bend over backwards.



#### **Savasana - corpse pose.**

Close our eyes. Play dead. This is what management wants us to do rather than fighting for a fair deal.



#### **Standing forward bend**

Represents the race-to-the-bottom in our conditions.

## Cops off campus



Yesterday a picketer at the University of Sydney strike had his leg broken by police. Many others bruised, scrapped, and shaken. Despite this the pickets held strong all day.

To date, after four days of heavily policed striking, not one person on a picket has been arrested for violent behaviour, and yet picketers themselves have been subjected to escalating violence by police.



Clearly police are not here for our safety, and they are not simply 'doing their job'. The pain they inflict supports the aims of millionaire VCs like Michael Spence who are willing to use violence against staff and students who are resisting policies that undermine their working conditions. Police attend strikes in order to hurt and intimidate us into submitting to further exploitation.

It is completely unacceptable that police are permitted to come on to our campuses and attack students and staff for peacefully picketing. They should be banned from all university campuses, just as they are in many other places around the world.



## Love and solidarity on the picket line

Again and again and again, the police crashed into our picket lines with overwhelming force. Next to me my friends, people I had just met, and others who I didn't even know, were shoved, trampled, choked, torn away and violently thrown to the ground. One student was punched in the head, another broke his leg, and another almost passed out after being placed in a headlock. Every time a car refused to respect our lines and tried to cross, the police would go on a rampage and attack us. Eventually, I lost count of how many times this happened.

At the time it all seemed Ok. We were getting attacked continually, but seemed to be holding our ground. Barely any cars at all were getting through. Often the cops couldn't physically get us off the roads we were blocking, and when they did we managed to reform our lines behind them almost immediately. I've never been much of a singer, but I sung picket songs with gusto that day.

Then there were the people. I don't think I can even find words to describe the sense of solidarity and camaraderie on the line that day. Those that I linked arms and fought the cops with were some of the most indefatigable, committed, militant and caring people I've ever met. The amount of compassion and support was astounding. Hugs flowed endlessly. Whenever someone was hurt, people would rush over to care for them. At one point police started to drag me away and someone ran over and pulled me out of their grip. Others were just so utterly fearless in the face of the cops' violence and intimidation that I feel like I'll respect them forever. In many ways, the whole thing was amazing.

Be safe and take care of each other, so that we can be dangerous together

## National student protests on Budget day



On May 14 students mobilised in numbers not seen in years against the Gillard government's cuts to higher education. The national student strike was called by the National Union of Students (NUS) in response to the biggest cuts to university funding in 17 years.

The funding cuts amount to 2.8 billion dollars and include restructuring youth allowance by scrapping the start-up scholarships at the start of semester (which about 260,000 students access) and offering loans instead, which will then have to be paid on HECS. This means that poorer students will actually be paying more HECS than rich students.



In Melbourne, 3,000 turned out to the State Library. Contingents from most of the major campuses traipsed in on buses or marched down to the library after holding speak-outs and rallies in the morning on campus. The rally was angry and energetic as students marched from the library down Swanston Street to Federation Square.

In Perth, there were two rallies, one 700 strong at Curtin University and the other with 50 people at UWA.

In Sydney, the national student strike coincided with a strike called by the NTEU at Sydney University in response to ongoing attacks from the administration. Students began the day by helping the staff on the picket line. The administration allowed riot cops to attack the staff and students and left one man with a broken leg. Later in the day, Sydney University activists linked up with the NTEU and other Sydney students for a rally of 500, after which 350 then marched to the city.



There were reasonable mobilisations, ranging from 150 to 300, in other states as well. At all of the rallies, the NTEU had a presence and gave support but the rallies were dominated by students.



Overall, the actions have been a step forward for students in Australia. Over the last few years, higher education has been corporatised at an alarming rate and students now pay some of the highest tuition fees in the world. We have also seen the National union of Students decline in influence because of the generally conservative approach of the Labor students who run it. These two things mean that the student movement is weak; a few months ago it would have been a real feat to have demonstrations even a third of the size of the ones we saw on 14 May.

## Ban Cops from Campus grounds

Open Letter to the Vice Chancellor of USYD, signed by 500 Staff, students and community members

Dr Spence,

As you are aware, a number of students and staff were substantially injured during Tuesday's protests, some quite seriously. You must stop inviting the riot police onto campus.

One student had his leg broken and is currently awaiting surgery. Other students and staff seem to have cracked ribs and one has a broken nose. Several students and staff members were trampled. Many others were shoved, grabbed, bruised or struck. These unprovoked attacks on protestors are nothing less than outrageous.

Another student was put in a potentially life-threatening situation when a police officer strangled him for nearly two minutes. He went without air for a minute and a half and has had to seek medical attention.

The danger with something like strangulation is damage to the hyoid bone, which is susceptible to fracture. Thus prolonged, forceful pressure against the neck is incredibly dangerous and can lead to asphyxiation. Permanent damage from oxygen deprivation can occur within a matter of minutes. One and a half minutes without oxygen is a long time in terms of respiration, and cerebral hypoxia (reduced oxygen supply to the brain) begins to set in rapidly.

Despite your rhetoric, the argument that the riot police bring order to the campus is transparently absurd. All footage and testimony shows that the police have been a force for violence and disruption.

One student also came close to suffering an epileptic fit. Despite repeated requests the riot police refused to help them, which is a clear indication that the riot police are not there for our safety.

All of these assaults and indignities could have been avoided if you did not allow the the

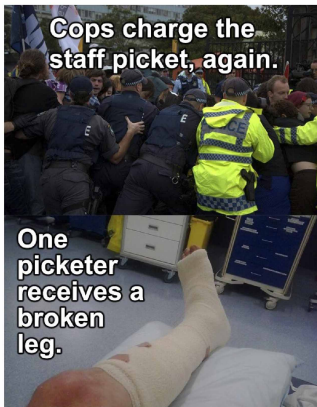
public order and riot squad on campus. The university has the right to exclude police from campus and should exercise it.

What is more, none of this was a once off or a bad day. Several protestors were arrested and assaulted with extreme violence during the previous strike. Despite clear video footage and testimony, trumped up charges against them have still not been dropped.

We are terrified that someone will suffer a more serious injury than a broken leg next strike day or protest.

We call on you, Vice-Chancellor Spence, to take responsibility for the safety of the university community, respect our right to protest, and cease allowing the police onto Sydney University grounds.

The undersigned



# Sydney Uni students slam police violence

May 27: The spirit of defiance and solidarity that marked the 14 May NTEU strike at Sydney University was recaptured on 23 May at a rally "For education quality, not police brutality".

Two weeks ago, NSW police violently attacked NTEU picket lines at the university, leaving behind a trail of injuries including a broken leg, cracked ribs and one student suffering from internal bleeding. But just as on the strike day, when we stood our ground and defended the picket lines, staff and students at Sydney Uni demonstrated that the thugs in the NSW police are not welcome on our campus. We will continue to fight for staff wages, conditions and job security and an all-round quality education system until we win.

The rally heard from a range of speakers including an NTEU militant and branch committee member, who condemned the university's complicity in the police attacks. He argued that while the university administration and the police have to resort to violence, our side has solidarity, with which we can ultimately win. Earlier in the week, Vice-Chancellor Michael Spence sent a

disgraceful letter to the Student Representative Council stating that the university "welcome[s]" the assistance of the NSW police on the picket lines.

Student speakers from the Education Action Group vowed to return to the picket lines in greater numbers and asserted that students will continue to show absolute solidarity and support to the staff in their EBA campaign. Given the recent \$2.8 billion cuts, joint student and staff campaigning will be essential in the fight for quality higher education.

The rally marched loudly through the campus to Spence's office to deliver our message directly. Unfortunately, he wasn't in to see us, but before the rally concluded, we chalked up a storm and left some parting messages on the outside of his office door and walls:

"Cops off campus!"  
"All Vice-Chancellors Are Bastards"  
"Sign the EBA"  
"We're not backing down! Fuck you!"

Our quick and determined political response achieved a minor victory - there was not a single cop and very few visible security guards on the campus, which was unlike every other protest this year.

**THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**

**USYD STUDENT**

- \* Violently arrested while participating in industrial action
- \* Later released without charge
- \* Banned by university from entering the campus

**NSW POLICE**

- \* Continue to attack staff, students, and community members participating in the strike
- \* Have broken the foot of one picketer and injured many others
- \* According to Michael Spence, USYD VC, police "have the right to be there ... we welcome their assistance"

**SPENCE MAKES NO SENSE**

**COPS OFF CAMPUS!**



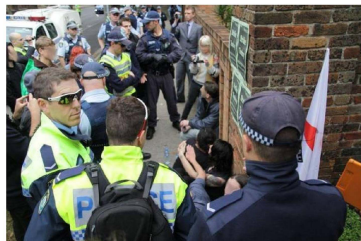
## Where to from June 5?



June 6: It didn't take long for the arrests to start at yesterday's strike. Barely an hour into the day's action, and an attack by massed riot police on the Carillon Avenue picket line had netted six people. No more than 45 minutes later, a further five were in police custody. Thus, within the space of two hours, the number of people arrested in the semester-long industrial dispute at the University of Sydney had tripled.



From the outset, the police were determined to make arrests. Cops on bicycles roamed around inside the university grabbing those that they could identify as activists. At the campus gates, the previous tactic of crashing into pickets and driving them off the road was abandoned in favour of dragging demonstrators into paddy wagons.



Many observed police distributing photos of prominent organisers, several of whom were hit with bizarre and seemingly arbitrary charges throughout the day. One student, who had been consistently pummelled during previous strikes, was singled out for standing in the path of a bicycle for no more than a few seconds, arrested, thrown to the ground, then repeatedly stomped in the face. Others were charged whilst walking along footpaths outside university grounds. Another was arrested simply for swearing. The head of security at USYD, Colin Bowman, was permitted to enter the holding cells, and identify individuals, while the lawyer acting for the accused was refused entry. All arrested comrades were denied legal consultation and were eventually released after a 6 hour siege of the police station.



In the conversations that flowed in the parks, streets and pubs after the pickets had wound down, the exhaustion and emotional toll taken by the day was strongly apparent. After the morning's violence and arrests, coming on top of the brutal treatment of picketers during the 14 May strike, many, while still determined, seemed to genuinely dread the prospect of another strike. With each action, the repression meted out by police has been steadily escalating. Large numbers have been arrested, bones broken and fractured, and demonstrators punched, shoved, choked and trampled. Dozens of others are doubtless suffering from the bruises and cuts, both emotional and physical, from

simply surviving the countless police charges on picket lines. One student, with only a touch of melodrama, predicted a 'bloodbath' in the event of further strikes next semester.

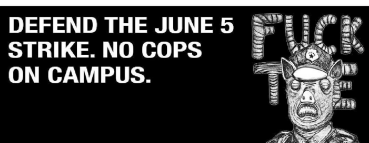
The bravery of those standing on the pickets has been astounding. After the outrage following the 14 May strike, more students than ever, knowing by now full well what awaited them, flocked to the pickets to stand directly in the face of all-out police assaults. Furthermore, the strikes are clearly having an effect. Campus is now largely empty on strike days, and the university's management has backed down on a number of its demands upon staff. With each strike, the militancy of the pickets, along with the numbers prepared to take strong action, has also been growing. Many vehicles have been prevented from entering the campus and the economic loss caused by each strike has no doubt been great.



Yet after five days of industrial action the strategic value of one-day strikes, each separated by several weeks, appears to be reaching its limit. While many are still determined, the ability of demonstrators to continue turning out to face set-piece massacres at the hands of the riot squad is also being strained. Without question, this is the intent of the police and the logic that underlies their increasing violence: to crush the pickets and demoralise staff and students. But this shouldn't prevent

questioning or reappraisal of the tactics being used. The diminishing number of staff appearing on pickets speaks of a disillusionment with the current repertoire of protest action, as well as a fear of the brutality that is now inevitably employed to combat these tactics. In this light, taking action inside the workplace while at work – particularly bans and go slows – appears more relevant and important than ever, with the ability to disrupt the functioning of the university without risking police attacks or loss of income.

Even after the formal conclusion of this industrial dispute, however, the attacks upon students and staff will continue. Further rounds of course closures, sackings and fee hikes appear inevitable in the wake of the government's \$2.8 billion cuts to university funding. The need for organising and for industrial action will not disappear with the signing of a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement. Increasingly, staff and students across campus are reaching out to each other beyond the formal channels of the unions, the Education Action Group and the official bargaining process. It is this slow, low-level organising in the places of work and study where we spend our lives – job actions to ensure the provisions of a new EBA are actually enforced, collective submission of timesheets of the actual hours worked by staff, slowdowns and refusals of unpaid overtime to force the hiring of new personnel – which will allow us to take small-scale action around our immediate daily conditions as students and university staff, action and struggles which are directly under our control and build a culture of self-activity and solidarity, lasting well beyond the conclusion of the current industrial dispute and EBA, at the University of Sydney and beyond.



## Solidarity with the USYD strike from Copenhagen

In the early hours of June 5 some anarchists redecorated the facade of the Australian embassy in Copenhagen with messages of solidarity with the ongoing strike at Sydney University. Students and workers at USYD have faced off against the pigs of the NSW police force on numerous occasions since April this year, in an ongoing campaign against neoliberal restructuring of their university. We sprayed:

NO JUSTICE NO PEACE



CUT SPENCE STAB SCIPIO



DROP ALL CHARGES AGAINST USYD STRIKERS  
OCCUPY & RESIST!



A.C.A.B.  
A.V.C.A.B.\*

FUCK NSW POLICE



FOR THE SYDNEY UNI COMMUNE

Over the past two months NSW Riot Police have attacked and charged dozens of staff and students defending pickets and barricades of the USYD campus, some strikers have had their bones broken by the pigs. In response to these attacks, we suggest comrades in Sydney respond with fire. Any armed attack on Vice Chancellor Michael Spence, NSW Pig Commissioner Andrew Scipione and their riot thugs is justified self-defence.

From Sydney to Santiago, Stockholm to Istanbul the neoliberal paradigm is being met with increasingly fierce resistance. As the rebels from Istanbul to Ankara have just shown us, if we wish live outside the forces of gentrification and austerity we must collectively organise to reclaim territory from police, developers and administrators and abolish capitalism from our lives.

TAKSIM SQUARE IS EVERYWHERE

ALL COPS ARE BASTARDS  
ALL VICE CHANCELLORS ARE BASTARDS\*

COMMUNISE SYDNEY UNI

- Unicorn Strike Brigade

# Precarious notes #1:

## 6 comments on the university and the dispute at Usyd

### *1. From the formal level of dispute to the submerged politics of work at the university*

The industrial dispute at the University of Sydney currently represents one of the key conflicts involving higher education and the education economy more broadly in Australia. The acuteness of the antagonism at USyd is growing increasingly sharp. Over the past 24 months university management have made a series of decisions that have made university workers angry and lose trust. For example the handling of the library restructures since early 2011, the announcement of 350 job cuts across general and academic staff in late 2011 - early 2012, and most recently the approach to the enterprise agreement has created sharp antagonism leading into the bargaining of the enterprise agreement. A recent survey conducted by the university shows that more than 75% of respondents have no faith in the university management. All of this represents good reason to be pissed off, and demonstrates its actuality. Yet it would be a mistake to think that all this anger is simply funnelled through the enterprise agreement, or that reaching even a favourable agreement will be able to resolve this anger. Whilst the dispute now is ostensibly focussed on the details of the enterprise agreement, beneath these formal dimensions there is a submerged world of the daily politics of work that is in fact the key terrain animating the antagonism.

Conversations in workplaces, meetings and on the picket lines provide the greatest insight into what is going on. These conversations uncover another world of the politics of work, where the daily compression of working life is creating growing anger and disillusion. The cutting of staff, growing

overtime, general intensification of work and ongoing casualisation define the negative dimension of this submerged world of work. The atomisation, isolation, competitiveness and stress that result from the squeeze on work are a recurrent theme in these conversations. The very real lack of a future that many people, particularly young workers, see within the university is a further expression of this compression of one's life within the confines of the demands of the university. The frequency with which the idea of leaving the university is expressed is telling. This is all playing out across the conditions of academic and general staff, and this is the real substance of the antagonisms that define university life.

It is quite clear that even at this negative level, the interests of workers and students at the university are in this sense in excess of the enterprise agreement. This excess should lead us to consider what there is already, and what more will need to happen, beyond the framework of the agreement. It is worth noting that many of the issues confronted on the daily level will not be addressed in the enterprise agreement. For this reason it is important to insist, particularly if we want to continue developing organisation and critique beyond the bargaining period, that this submerged politics of work is in fact the pivotal terrain that we need to understand and act from. Making this argument does not mean to undermine the dispute thus far in terms of its development around the enterprise agreement, but rather it is to insist that pushing further the politics that have bubbled to the surface of university life over the past two years requires that we continually create a political horizon beyond the formal level of the dispute.

In a number of respects this is already beginning to take some form. The fact that these conversations are happening immediately between workers and students themselves is one indication in itself. The

move towards on the ground and bottom-up organising at a departmental and workshop level is a necessary and welcome tendency. Beyond this, the degree of collective autonomous organisation that is taking place by various groups of students and workers is creating a vibrancy, dynamism and longer-term perspective that is necessary. Each of these factors should not be overstated, but they do show that in spite of the negative dimension of university life, a collective political force is growing.

## *2. The materiality of the university and the problem of nostalgia*

The above is directly relevant to how we understand the university – that is USyd and the university institution more generally. The image of the university of the past as an uncorrupted institution of learning, untouched by the social relations that define it, was always out of step with its realities, and is today an idea impossible to entertain for even a moment, and yet the nostalgia for this image remains. And whilst a growing awareness of the rearrangements of the organisation of work as well as the commodification of education is evident, the political and organisational implications of this remain less clear. To a significant degree, the responses to the question of how to organise within the university remain in the shadow cast by the above nostalgia. That is, even when the conditions of the university are met more or less soberly, the political orientation swings back to an idealised past that at best was based upon a different composition of university labour, namely when it was possible to find an ongoing job. However, it is clear now this cannot be maintained, that the organisation of work and the product of the university is precisely of the world of capital.

The main limit of the image of nostalgia creates is that it is out of step with the

current and developing class composition of the university, and it is basically an idea of the tenured professor's university. In this sense it is a horizon of political possibility and desirability that has little to nothing to do with the overall position of the university now, nor with the conditions of the vast majority of workers at the university. The problem then, is to begin from the actual materiality of the university, and to pose political and organisational questions firmly on this terrain, to resist the pull of nostalgia.

Doing so is a substantial task, much of which is beyond the scope of these comments. To briefly outline what this might involve, it would be necessary to consider at the very least the place of education in the overall economy; to consider what the primary outputs of research are; the shifting role of teaching within the university; the relationship between students, work and debt; the relationship between the university, the border, visas and migration, and so on. These issues would require a political response adequate to their specificity and how they function as an assemblage – for example, as has been pointed out by others, asking the question of how to subvert the role of the university as an institution complicit with border policing.

More immediate to the purpose of these comments is perhaps the impacts of the division of labour within the university. This is a question that needs to be taken up organisationally and politically. The most obvious general division is between general and academic staff, which each has its own respective divisions. Without going into any detail here, one issue that is relevant to general and academic staff (not to mention the workers in cafes and shops on campus) is that of casualisation and precarious work. In terms of the organisation of labour at the university, and the relationship between workers and the university, this is the pivotal and dominant question. It is this relationship

that defines much of the materiality of the contemporary university.

The problem of precarity, most clearly manifest in casual work across the tertiary sector, is a very real one. Indeed it has been for some time now. As one example, workers employed on casual or fixed term contracts do over half of teaching work, and increasingly make up the numbers of library and IT services. It is a welcome development that the conversation around this issue has been taken up within the official perspective of the unions, but the lateness with which they have arrived at the conversation is not without consequences. Namely, ongoing inability to pose the problem clearly, and thus engage the organisational difficulties that arise therefrom effectively.

The temporality of casual and precarious work, the speed, and the precise yet blurry mechanisms that punctuate it, constitutes a particular arrangement of one's life that is always in some sense a condition of working. This complicates the question of organisation, and is markedly distinct from the condition of established academics. Indeed, the layer of workers who constitute established academics is itself dwindling. Confronting this fact is the least that needs to happen. The real question and moment of conflict emerges from how young, casual workers understand their own condition and what they want to do about it. It is certain that on minor levels responses to this are already in motion, and have been for some time. Finding various circuits to amplify this process, defined by the workers themselves might be the best way to ask the organisational question.

### *3. Edu-factory and/or the service-university*

There have been a number of initiatives that seek to come to terms with the position of the university in contemporary capitalism. The critique of the university as edu-factory

is one of the more interesting of these, beginning from the hypothesis that 'as was the factory, so now is the university'. For the theorists of the edu-factory the university is a key site of antagonism between labour and capital, 'where the ownership of knowledge, the reproduction of the labour force, and the creation of social and cultural stratifications are all at stake'. Recent conferences organised by students in Canberra and Sydney have taken up this term, and used it as a lens to critique the university as they experience it today.

Given the emphasis on education and knowledge economies today for economic competitiveness and accumulation, the edu-factory is not really a controversial thesis. As a conceptual lens it is useful for understanding and critiquing a series of metrics to which labour at the university is subject. Regardless of where one works within the university, systems of measurement will be a familiar dynamic that sets various paces to your work. Such metrics form a kind of punctuation to work that resonates with the idea of standardised, homogenous factory work.

Nonetheless, the edu-factory and the image the factory conjures up is somewhat out of step with the non-linear, permanently working condition that defines so much university labour. In this sense, university labour is also very much a form service work, with the often blurry and indistinct boundary between work and non-work time, and a complicated relationship to its object of production. The service-university is evident in various ways. From the proliferation of cafes, kitchens, and retail around universities, to the services that keep libraries and IT labs running, to academic work and the content and form of teaching, a service dynamic is apparent as a defining element of university labour.

At various levels these questions complicate the image of industrial activity on campus.

#### 4. *Politics on the picket lines and the question of militancy*

The picket lines, functioning for now as the most visible and collective moment of antagonism, bring all of the above issues and tensions together. The pickets are thus a complex political space, which bring into contact the various perspectives, interests and practices of different workers, students and groups. As such, the pickets have been a space of political composition that have helped to circulate stories and experience, as well as a place where various tensions have found their clearest expression.

There are many political perspectives, interests and groups involved in the pickets and the campaign more broadly. Each of these often have their own perspective on the best way to organise the pickets, make decisions, and on the overall goals of the campaign. One of the clearest questions that has arisen is that of who should be able to make decisions about the conduct of the pickets. At one level there is the picket protocol that is the official position on how union members should organise the pickets. There are a number of workers and picket marshals that argue that this is the final word, and that it should be followed strictly. Others see the protocol more as a field within which, depending on circumstances, various decisions and actions can be justified. Still others have argued that the picket lines themselves should be able to decide how they organise themselves, and what actions they take. Very useful, if at times heated, debate about these questions has occurred across most of the strike days. In fact, each of these perspectives is of greater or lesser influence on different picket lines. However, it is important to emphasise the importance of the latter perspective, which sees the picket line as a political space in its own terms that is organised by the participants on it. This perspective allows those who are participating to make

meaningful and active decisions about the form and content of the politics of the dispute. This perspective helps to build the democratic organisational capacities of the workers and students involved.

One point that has been heard raised in conversation is that of the degree of a stake that participants in the pickets have in the outcome of the dispute. From this perspective if staff members think that diverging from picket protocol will damage the campaign and undermine the agreement with management then this interest should be respected over those of other participants who diverge from the strict adherence to the protocol, or who may not work at the university, as those who do not work at university have nothing to directly lose in this. However, it is not the case that there is agreement within the university staff that sticking to picket protocol is the most tactical, strategic or desirable decision to make. Many workers have been involved in pickets that have held the picket lines when they have tried to be closed by police. Moreover, many staff have been involved in debates with union marshals and other workers on the picket lines and made arguments that those on the picket should be the ones to make the decisions about what tactics they use. It is also clear that in a number of cases it is only through the process of resisting the breaking of the picket lines that the pickets have managed to effectively close the entrance being picketed.

There are good reasons to be positive about the debates, decisions and development of the pickets, including the decisions to hold the lines against the police. At the same time, it is necessary to be cautious in overstating the significance of this. Whilst an accumulation of political experience and confidence is evident on the picket lines, it is also unclear as yet whether the growing antagonism on the pickets is an expression of the overall direction of a growing number of participants and reflective of the strength of

the campaign, or rather indicative of growing polarisation between participants. Polarisation can be important, and can open up greater political space, but it can also close down communication and debate when it is precisely more communication and debate that needs to happen. Awareness of this latter point is necessary for maintaining a strong campaign immediately, as well as for ongoing organising beyond the formal dispute.

The question of militancy has also recurred throughout the conversations at the pickets and about them. The question of militancy is in some respects a deceptively simple one. That is, a common argument is that if a picket line holds against the demands to move and let a car through, then this is a more militant picket than one that does not make this decision. On some level, there is truth in this, and for my part, if a picket line decides it wants to hold the line then that is what it should do. Of course, there is still another question here about decision-making - and there is no reason to assume at the outset that just because a picket decided to hold that the decision was made democratically. However, it is also useful to have an understanding of militancy that is not simply defined by willingness for physical conflict. As noted above, there is no necessary reason to assume that just because a picket line held that therefore the campaign is stronger - more needs to happen for this to be the case. At the same time, there are any number of minor shifts that can take place that indicate a growing radicalisation than does the amount of physical conflict with the police.

## 5. *Cops, policing and edu-capital*

A further aspect to the dispute that has received a lot of attention has been the policing of the picket lines. The police tactics and the arrests are definitely worthy of condemnation. Further, the fury and contempt that people feel for the police is legitimate and understandable. But we might gain something if we focus not on the particular dispositions of individual cops, but rather place the actions of the police in the context of the particular dispute underway at the university of Sydney, and the broader processes of restructuring education. That is, the use of repressive force in this context is better explained not through the poor moral fibre of Spence nor the malevolence of individual cops, but rather by acknowledging that the dispute here is but one aspect of a deeper conflict. The process of restructuring that is playing out, and dynamics and contradictory interests that are expressed through it, at some level always involve the use of force, and in this instance the repressive force of the state is necessary to secure the interests of the functionaries of capital.

On the other hand, there is very good reason to take the trauma, anxiety and fear that the police have caused seriously. As others have noted, the actions of the police do have a real impact on people's ability to maintain participation in these forms of conflict. Perhaps one way to acknowledge this, and to do something with it, is to valorise the many other ways of acting and participating in this struggle that are not defined by physical confrontation with the police. The effectiveness of any political activity is always dependent on a variety of activities coming together coherently and meaningfully.



## 6. *Where next?*

This is now the key question. There are two levels to the response to this question, but these are related. One remains within the framework of the enterprise agreement and the specific campaign targeting this. The second is that of ongoing organising beyond the current dispute, involving the development of infrastructures of collective, bottom-up, democratic organisation, and connecting these together.

The pickets and strikes have been effective so far, and the level of activity on campus shows a lot of potential. In terms of the immediate dispute, the means by which to escalate the campaign is a key one. The strike, at the very least for academic staff, is geared towards the university as teaching institution. This is evident to the degree that whilst the strike shuts down campus and classes, the rhythm of research work is not effectively interrupted by such activity. This is not to undermine the effectiveness of the strike activity so far, but merely to be realistic about what strikes achieve in a place like the university, and to challenge us to think harder about what other options there are. In some respects this comes back to the question of the edu-factory and the service-university – in the factory a strike had a more total effect on production, but between the edu-factory and the service-university, it has perhaps only partial effect.

Other options that have been raised include work bans, withholding of marks and other such activity. These options also do not address the relationship of our labour time to the process of research and the role of this in the university. On another level, and this came up in a conversation on the picket line, it is not clear that these options would be as effective as a strike, and may possibly undermine the strike action. These are difficult questions to answer.

Perhaps one way of addressing the relationship of research to the university, and the difficulty of separating this work from the valorisation of the university, is to develop counter and co-research spaces that explicitly address the critique of the university. Such co-research spaces with a political focus can be simultaneously at the edge of the university, as well as aimed against it. Further, such spaces could break down the hierarchies of who the “thinkers” of the university are, and begin to draw connections between academic staff, general staff and students and create a common political space of conversation, research and action. To be clear, such research would not replicate academic research, but develop common relationships between those involved. If it is so difficult to subvert the relationship between research labour from the interests of the university, then perhaps the best option is to develop counter spaces that delink our activity from the university as capital, and break down the divisions of labour imposed by the university.

On the second level of the question of where next, the clear need is for the development of participatory spaces from which staff and students can organise themselves directly, and develop decision making power around the immediate issues they face.

## Resources:

[sydneyuni.org](http://sydneyuni.org)  
[classwaru.org](http://classwaru.org)  
[zinelibrary.info](http://zinelibrary.info)  
[edu-factory.org](http://edu-factory.org)  
[unicommon.org](http://unicommon.org)  
[recomposition.info](http://recomposition.info)  
[occupyeverything.org](http://occupyeverything.org)  
[afterthefallcommuniques.info](http://afterthefallcommuniques.info)  
[australianmuseumofsqatting.org](http://australianmuseumofsqatting.org)



# THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

STRIKE SYMPATHIZERS



A man in a dark suit, white shirt, and pink tie is speaking at a wooden podium. He has his hands raised in a gesture. Behind him is a blue banner with the University of Sydney crest and the text "The University of Sydney". The crest features a shield with a red top section containing a lion, a white middle section with a book, and a blue bottom section with a star. The motto "SIDERE MENS EADEM MUTATO" is written on a ribbon below the shield. To the right of the podium is a floral arrangement with white and pink flowers.

**NO  
FUTURE**

**STRIKE OCCUPY  
COMMUNISE  
USYD**