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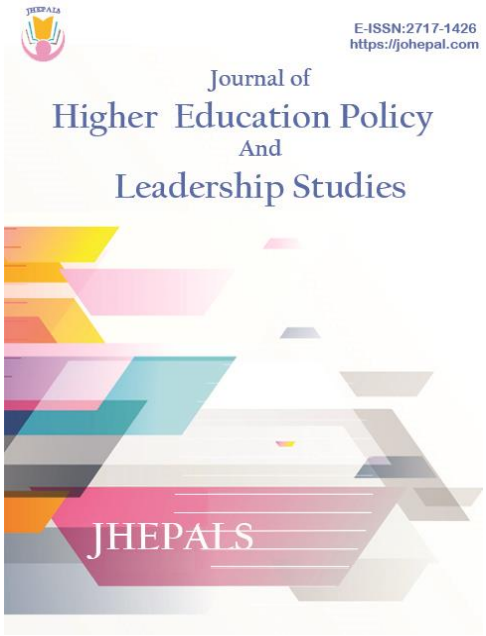

Rethinking Capitalist Governance of Higher Education Towards an Anarcho-Syndicalist Model for Academia

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Abstract

Universities are increasingly led by non-academic managers and corporate leaders, rather than academics. This shift comes after the adoption of capitalist logics and corporate practices which undermine the core purpose of higher education. The corporatisation of university governance has shifted the academy away from serving the public good, instead driving profit-driven agendas, academic-military alliances, and the marginalisation of liberatory and transformative scholarship. In this paper, we contemplate a radical reimagination of the current model of governance to reclaim the university as a site of knowledge creation, dissemination and social critique that values diversity, plurality and positive transformation. Drawing on principles of anarcho-syndicalism, we propose a decentralised, democratic model of academic governance that empowers marginalised voices, fosters critical inquiry, and prioritises collective wellbeing over capitalist interests. We emphasise that any reimagining of academic governance must incorporate decolonial and intersectional perspectives to challenge the colonial and imperial legacies that continue to shape higher education.

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Keywords: Academic Leadership; Neoliberalism; Corporatisation; Anarcho-Syndicalism; Decolonial; Higher Education Transformation

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Introduction

Universities are led by a wide variety of professional managers, from the vice-chancellery through faculty and school leadership, who circulate amidst a relatively static corporate leadership bubble. In particular, the vice chancellery in Australia has in recent times begun to employ non-academic former members of public office and other high-profile businesspeople. This influx of commercial, corporate and public-sector managers has brought with it a dearth of academic qualifications and experience, ranging from deputy vice-chancellors (research) who do not hold a PhD nor any research qualifications, to vice chancellors who might barely hold a bachelor's degree or MBA but lack research qualifications and experience in academic life. This new class of administrative leadership brings to higher education the same logics and interests that have driven the intensification of extractive capitalism in the mainstream, termed neoliberalism by theorists and analytical thinkers (Giroux, 2002, 2014; Morley, 2024; Shore, 2010). As a configuration of profit-driven practices that intensify extant capitalist structures, neoliberalism at the intersection of higher education offers only further danger in the global context of climate emergency, wealth inequality, neo-colonialism and divisive and anti-worker politics which grip the broader political landscape (Banfield et al., 2016; Davies & Bansel, 2010; Fraser, 2021; Klein, 2015; Thunberg, 2022).

Corporate and business logics transform educational institutions away from the public good (Fisher, 2018; Giroux, 2023; Marginson, 1999, 2011). They drive further investment into academic-military alliances, which extract massive human and environmental tolls daily (Giroux, 2007). They enable the narcissistic and manipulative practices of managers who seek to extract the maximum labour from, and exact an emotional toll on, academic workers (Brennan, 2010; Crew, 2020; Guidetti et al., 2020). Through these logics, and the rationalisation of employing under-qualified and under-experienced managers, the institutions justify broader moves which undermine quality, accessible and meaningful tertiary education, even with its flaws (Bennett & Lumb, 2019; Brabazon, 2021, 2024; Cardak & Ryan, 2009). They continue to allow the advancement of knowledge imperialism and epistemicide (de Sousa Santos, 2015; Rigney, 2017; Sherington & Horne, 2010). Moreover, and importantly, they advance and maintain the status quo which privileges white, male, neurotypical, able-bodied, conservative perspectives, and favours 'entrepreneurialism' over investigation of liberatory models (Arnot, 1982; Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2023; Fotaki, 2013; Gramsci, 1996; Marx, 1976; Shor & Freire, 1987).

These significant education systems are increasingly led by outsiders: those who may once have participated in education, but are largely beneficiaries of the status quo and not actively engaged in academic work (Brabazon, 2021). Moreover, recent politicisation of institutional leadership, through the direct transfer of the political class into institutional governance in the form of council membership and into academic leadership in the form of vice chancellery, shows yet another power-play towards enforcing hegemonic control of universities (Gramsci, 1996; Grattan, 2024). Here, higher education's history of reconfiguration by government as an instrument of long-term maintenance of the status quo requires further examination, particularly in relation to the political economy and the role of universities in shaping, maintaining and empowering traditional intellectuals. Moreover, further discussion of the relationship between capital, political society, civil

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society, and the role of universities in knowledge legitimation is required to fully contextualise the nature and potential harm of the changing governance and leadership landscape of Australian universities.

In this paper, we explore the relationship between the hegemonic status quo and higher education, the role of politics in shaping worker stasis under capitalist exploitation, and briefly the landscape of higher education governance as deleterious to the liberation of working people through educational ends. We also introduce, as an antidote to extractive, expropriative and raced/gendered capitalist control of social systems, a way towards an anarcho-syndicalist model of academic governance, not borrowing from 1950s models of governance for the malestream, but towards a distributed form of worker-run governance of education for education, not capital.

Capital, Political Society and Universities

Capitalism has proliferated globally as both an economic and political model of production (Gramsci, 1977; Harvey, 2005; Marx, 1974, 1990). Capitalism, fundamentally, is a political economy. It demands 99% of people sell their labour power to a capitalist who sells the products of their labour for an additional profit and thereby employ additional workers for their labour power, acquire more raw materials and resources and accumulate capital for their own leisure and security. Workers, products and materials are forced into an artificial (political) marketplace in an unbalanced race to the bottom which demands sacrifices from the 99% to live indentured to a selection of capitalists. This economic system also demands constant unsustainable expansion to lavish the capitalist class with ever more accumulated riches. This ceaseless expansion has driven brutal and genocidal colonialism, systemic orchestrated ecological collapse, and massive climate change in the name of purported human progress (Marx, 1976, 1990). A fundamental part of this economic system has been the creation and maintenance of a capitalist epistemology. Cleverly divided into disciplines and specialities, akin to Fordist production-line labour, the traditional intellectual group includes academics, doctors, lawyers, public officers, and more, each with their own area of expertise (Gramsci, 1996). This group, initially through manufactured consent, later through manufacturing consent, enforce the capitalist status quo alongside perpetuation of their discipline area (Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2023; Gramsci, 1996). For example, environmental scientists evaluating a new mining site for significant species, funded by the mining corporation, are unlikely to be able to employ academic agency, should they even wish to.

Capitalism, like a virus, attaches itself to new knowledge creation, to the dialogues between teacher and student, in politics to continue creating comfort for the capitalist class, and so on. In this way, capitalism is both a political economy and an epistemology. Its mandatory attachment to the production of new ideas, the sharing of learnings, and its configuration of dissemination amongst educated peoples (qua traditional intellectuals) ensures its continued survival (Gramsci, 1996). Moreover, with time, globalisation and massification of the capitalist economic system, there has developed amongst workers and capitalists alike a fatalism in capitalist social organisation. For example, political parties may exist on a spectrum from progressive to conservative, but all parties (barring hard-fringe parties) will assume continuation of capitalism is a prima facie requirement for their policy platform. Indeed, to even question capitalist engagement, particularly in the United States,

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leaves people branded traitors and communists (in, for example, negative connection to Stalin). This manufactured consent, and effectively peer pressure, perpetuates capitalism as the system regardless of opportunities rendered by new ways of thinking (Herman & Chomsky, 1994).

From the capitalist political economy emerges two clusters of interest to this paper: first, political society (qua capitalists, politicians and decision-makers), and second, education and the traditional intellectual (qua academics, doctors, lawyers, priests, and so on). The former, members of political society, are holders, creators and dictators of the policy expression, national direction, political economy broadly, and the rules, laws and legislation which maintain capitalism's interests (i.e., capitalism's continuation, not actually the continuation of the capitalist class, which is far more mutable). The latter, the education system and its traditional intellectuals, work in a subservient role to capital amidst civil society, educating future capitalists and workers (Marx, 1990). The education received between these groups, however, is radically different, even when performed in the same physical location (Knopp, 2012). Such is the power of the war of position; differentially manufactured consent, which focusses on cultural and ideological struggle, displaces or infiltrates the epistemology of working people such that capitalism is naturalised even though it comes at extraordinary cost to even the most ardent vanguards. Here, it is worth some additional exploration of the role and organisation of universities traditionally, and their changing role throughout the 1950-1990s that began the slow transformation of the mechanism which continues to enable the cultural and ideological hegemony of capitalism.

Universities in Australia fundamentally changed, starting in the 1950s and continuing through the late 1990s, as they were reimagined as centres of mass education and training. Through the opening of existing institutions beyond the upper class male, initially through bourgeois women's inclusion in limited educational initiatives and ultimately through relatively weak inclusion strategy which enabled limited proletarian access to university, Australia's institutions moved from the traditionalist 'elite' form, to a more generalised and open institutional model (Cornelius-Bell, 2021; Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2023). During this time, academic governance began to transform. When an institution based on hierarchy, rules and tradition is forced to transform, it heralds a need for new methods to maintain relative status quo. In this case, while working class people could access university, and in some instances be paid to study, they were to be licensed with knowledge, not to be producers of it. From a system where bourgeoisie white men progressed through research and teaching, into leadership, and on to retirement in constant rotation, a radical change would be required to sure up bourgeois white male hegemony. Stronger corporate governance was born here, and while corporate councils (the peak management body of Australian universities) slowly grew, academic governance became less collegial and slowly separated from the (rapidly changing) academic coalface (Baldridge, 1971; Barnes, 2020; Blackmore et al., 2010; Boden & Rowlands, 2022).

In the quest to maintain the traditional intellectual class outside academia, academic governance required reconfiguration. Moreover, because the benefits a relatively trained petit bourgeoisie had on the economy for capitalists, this educational massification continued for decades. However, 'entry requirements' and unwritten social rules maintained the hierarchies of attainment and positionality in a vast array of traditional intellectual disciplines. For example, from the continued locking of Aboriginal peoples out of

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degrees, through selection practices preventing women entering medicine, the academy of the 1960s – 1990s remained highly stratified and rife with inequality. Though, as the Australian Labor party brought neoliberalism to Australia (Humphrys, 2019), the fundamental rules and roles of higher education in the country, too, were transformed. This demanded the invention of a class system, or at least a nested cluster of privilege levels, to ensure the unwritten rules were maintained, and that the traditional intellectual strata perpetuated epistemic capitalism. Through time, this can be seen in the installation of ceaselessly corporatised university governing bodies, the installation of vice chancellors and senior leaders with expertise in private business and commercialisation, and the rewriting of laws and rules by political society to ensure higher education's ongoing governance by a hegemonic mainstream.

So far, we have explored the fundamentally extractive and engrossing nature of capitalism, the terraforming of epistemology, governance and politics reconfigured by capitalist logics, and the role of education in producing intellectuals to produce intellectuals who are deeply imbued with capitalist logics. We have also briefly explored the role of government legislature and systematic transformation which demanded institutional industrial transformation and the solidification of capitalist logics in educational management. Next, we require additional explication of knowledge legitimation, or the way in which the academy, traditional intellectual, and social organisation accept, transform and confer knowledge production, which is itself woven with capitalist frames.

Knowledge Legitimation

Capitalism demands that knowledge is legitimated. In this way, knowledge is filtered, sorted and validated for broader distribution. The key organ for much of this work is the academy; universities have continued to act as a bourgeois filter and disseminator for knowledge collection, legitimation and (preceding internet connectivity, a relatively limited form of) dissemination (Jessop, 2018; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Historical records, scientific discoveries and philosophical insights were all subject to this process of academic scrutiny and validation. Through common processes such as peer review, knowledge is reviewed, revised and transformed, and at times redirected towards hegemonic complicity ('toned down') or outright rejected due to perceptions of radical advancement (c.f. da Silva, 2013; Lubinski et al., 2024). This system not only determined what knowledge was deemed worthy of preservation and propagation, but also shaped the very nature of intellectual discourse. Resultingly, the academy inserted itself into contemporary western social organisation both as gatekeeper and key part of the catalyst for the development and dissemination of knowledge: the education of others into these traditions. While academics have served in roles that critique and transform knowledge of and for society, this analytical activist thinking requires resistance to normative models of research and education and exacts a human toll through burnout and micro-politics. Moreover, with a growing use of (social) media required of researchers and institutions, academia maintains a role in shaping public discourse and legitimating knowledge to date (c.f. Jonker et al., 2022).

Knowledge systems (epistemologies), however, which conflict with colonial, capitalist and mainstream views are frequently 'fighting' at the interstices between community knowledge and institutional legitimation. The process of systemic knowledge invalidation

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and simultaneous expropriation and decontextualisation is termed epistemicide (de Sousa Santos, 2015). Conceptually, and related to the role the academy fills in knowledge legitimation (or filtering), epistemicide refers to the systematic destruction, suppression or devaluation of knowledge systems, particularly those belonging to marginalised or non-western cultures (Hall & Tandon, 2017). Epistemicide occurs when one knowledge system, in almost all cases the western hegemon, is exalted at the expense of local or Indigenous knowledge systems, leading to the slow demise of these other ways of knowing (Paraskeva, 2016). In the massified and globalised context which higher education now rests, epistemicide leverages academia's legitimator to suppress and silence Indigenous and non-hegemonic knowledge through silence and other more visible forms of epistemic violence. Moreover, with the impact of epistemicide now extending beyond cultural loss, higher education systems continue to play an active role in shaping knowledge imperialism, marginalising the value of non-western knowledges through devaluing, undermining the methods and production of new knowledge in these epistemologies, and the systemic prevention of subsequent academic dissemination (Hall & Tandon, 2017).

Epistemicide and the shaping of human epistemology to centre capitalism extends the hegemonic control of the institution, however it simultaneously creates problems for management and containment of academic processes. When education systems are massified, the traditional intellectual class can grow. While an abundance of labour holds benefit for the capitalist class, in that they can select from a market of labourers willing to proselytise themselves for subsistence purposes, particularly in the case of precarious and working-class academics (Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2021; Crew, 2020; Rickett & Morris, 2021), it also signals a growing middle class. For a capitalist system in crisis, which it seldom is not, the reconfiguration of the university sector has required the development of a new class of leadership and management.

New Management and a Slow Tightening Vice

The adoption of corporate-style councils and the wholesale importation of commercial management practices into academia is not new (Giroux, 2014; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Zipin, 2019). However, combining this with the increasing appointment of business leaders to key university positions, often with limited to no academic qualifications or experience, and now the importation of politicians into councils and chancellery positions, signals another constriction of the mesmerising corporate vice that is gripping academia (Brabazon, 2021; c.f. Grattan, 2024). From the top–down, universities have moved away from forms of collegial governance that had historically served to ensure academia's role as the hegemony's research arm, towards a quantitative, countable and individualistic mode of operation which rewards narcissism, expropriation within the academy itself and ego inflation (Connell, 2019). This has created myriad problems for academics, students and indeed corporate managerialists alike. With the hegemon's repositioning of higher education as a tool for manufacturing relatively unskilled knowledge-workers, there have been teething pains which allow the grip of disinformation, the further corporatisation of knowledge work and science, and are concurrent with fundamental changes in populist and right-wing governments globally (Andreucci, 2018; Boulianne et al., 2020; Brabazon et al., 2019; Carlson, 2016).

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Rethinking Capitalist HE Governance

The reconfiguration of universities under capitalist logics represents a fundamental shift in the nature and purpose of higher education (Connell, 2019; Fisher, 2018; Marginson, 2011). This transformation, occurring gradually yet pervasively, has reshaped institutions from bastions of knowledge creation and dissemination into market-oriented entities aligned with capitalist principles. Specifically, while there have been challenges for the hegemony, they have ultimately successfully reformed universities as a tool of hegemonic reinforcement now governed by despotic and narcissistic managers and an underclass of coalface academics squeezed for 'production' like other capitalist industries (Marx, 1990). Even setting aside, momentarily, the epistemicide perpetuated in mainstream academia, there are now even greater barriers to analytical and transformative thought in the academy compared to, say, the 1960s, which briefly enabled worker-student alliances and other activist thought (Cornelius-Bell, 2021; Hastings, 2003). As raised above, the core of this shift is the adoption of corporatised governance structures, mirroring those found in the private sector. This structural change is accompanied by the implementation of performance metrics and key performance indicators quantifying academic output through publication counts, citation indices and grant income (c.f. Shore & Wright, 2015). Such metrics, purporting objectivity, frequently fail to capture the nuanced nature of academic work and have led to a narrowing of research focus ensuring an enduring focus on hegemonic agendas and marginalised teaching practices along intersectional race/class/gender lines.

Commodification of education stands here as a tragic example of the success of capitalist logics in re-writing the rules of the academy. The transformative, liberatory and revolutionary skillset a university education might have offered has been forestalled despite ongoing discussion in leftist student fora on campus, and, rather, while transformation has occurred, it is the transformation of university education for capital. Indeed, universities now often treat education as a product to be sold, particularly to international students, with marketing and branding becoming central to institutional operations (Bunce et al., 2017; Molesworth et al., 2009; Singleton-Jackson et al., 2010). The ongoing commodification of universities extends across research, with an increased focus on patentable outputs and paid industry partnerships. Many institutions have established commercialisation offices, with additional awards being unequally offered to the handful of disciplines with potentially profitable discoveries, further blurring the lines between academic inquiry and profit-driven innovation. This shift not only alters the nature of knowledge production, it also raises questions about the independence and integrity of university scholarship, a concern of little regard to the corporate institution.

In pursuit of 'efficiency', and due to continuous cost-cutting and funding changes from government, universities have increasingly adopted precarious and disempowering employment practices. The reduction of permanent staff in favour of a further underclass of casual and short-term contract positions has become widespread and offers little but psychological torture and endemic precarity for often already less-privileged academic workers (Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2021; Fudge & Owens, 2006; Standing, 2014). This trend, too, coupled with the consolidation and closure of less profitable schools and disciplines and a continuous reduction of courses which are 'less popular' or 'too liberal', demonstrates the continued prioritisation of financial considerations over educational and social value. Indeed, the reconfiguration of disciplines whose critical thinking skills were briefly desirable

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to employers of knowledge workers have sometimes been a sticking-point for accreditors and demanded, for example, the removal of philosophy course offerings. Moreover, between configuring the institution as a business, and the pivoting of research towards commercial ends, the reconstitution of the student-university relationship is additionally telling, with the grip of 'student as consumers' models (c.f. Partington, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017). This approach, the treating of students as consumers rather than learners, emphasises customer 'satisfaction' and employability outcomes over critical thinking and intellectual growth (Naidoo & Williams, 2015). To students, both domestic and international, then, the university is a business, and should, it follows, offer a product and high level of service, not necessarily intellectual stretch.

Funding models for higher education have also been reshaped by government in collaboration with corporate stakeholders (the hegemony) to align with market principles. The introduction of performance-based funding for research and teaching has created a competitive environment where universities vie against each other for limited government resources (Aprile et al., 2021; Stokes & Wright, 2012). This 'competition', ostensibly driving 'excellence', results in a narrow focus on metrics at the expense of authentic educational goals. Moreover, while some initiatives seek to redress the problems created by this market-driven educational model directly with students (c.f. Dollinger & Lodge, 2020; Walsh & Jaquet, 2023), the hegemonic managerialism within universities continues in successive victories to entrench capitalist logics, with increased power given to micromanagers over academic decision-making (Deem et al., 2007).

The gradual privatisation of universities, the reconfiguration of funding, the changes to teaching and research, and the continued emphasis on metrics, public-private partnerships, and an enduring onus manufactured by management to capitalise, cost save and corporatise have been the hallmarks of institutional governance for too long. Recently, there has been a growing emphasis on entrepreneurship in curriculum and research alongside the establishment of startup incubators and innovation hubs within universities; the 'AI-ready' student of the future university is sadly more likely to be replaced with a large language model than find bona fide success. While knowledge in 'innovation' and 'real-world application of knowledge' can be valuable, the rampant commitment to entrepreneurialism overshadows crucial aspects of education and research for positive transformation. Fundamentally, we need a re-think to academic governance and leadership which holds space for the margins, intersticies and a better collective future not marred by climate destruction and colonial capitalist extractivism (Carbin, 2021; Cooms et al., 2022; Fraser, 2022). The cumulative effect of all of these changes is a university system that, while 'modernised' and 'efficient', is ill-equipped to fulfil its critical social function.

In the face of global challenges such as climate destruction, rising inequality, and the erosion of democratic norms, the need for universities to serve as bastions of critical thought and transformative action has never been more urgent. The task ahead, then, is not merely to resist the further corporatisation of higher education, but to actively forge alternative models of academic governance that can terraform the university, such that it fulfils its role as a catalyst for social change and human emancipation. It is to this possibility that we now turn, exploring how principles of collective organisation and democratic control might offer a path towards an intellectually stronger, more just and sustainable future for higher education.

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Anarcho-Syndicalist Principles for University Governance

Anarcho-syndicalism, a theory drawing on collective organisation and distributed leadership, offers a provocative alternative to the capitalist logics that dominate the university as a site of fundamentally unequal hegemonic reproduction. The theory, born from the work of theorists such as Rocker (1989) and enhanced in practices of early twentieth century labour movements, proposes a model of social organisation based on worker self-management, direct action and the abolition of wage labour. At its core, anarcho-syndicalism advocates for the direct democratic control of institutions by those who work within them (Rocker, 1989; Scott-Brown, 2024). In the late-capitalist academic context discussed above, this would entail a radical restructuring of university governance, shifting power away from corporate boards and managerial hegemons towards a model of collective decision-making involving all members of the university community (c.f. Berry & Bantman, 2010). We propose that such a model, tailored in negotiation and co-design, could counteract the trend towards intensification of managerialism and the erosion of academic autonomy that has characterised higher education for decades. Anarcho-syndicalist principles apply to academic contexts particularly well, especially in the context of constant crisis of precarious labour and existential threat to freedom of academic thought in universities today. With the casualisation of academic work, itself a direct result of neoliberal cost-cutting measures, a vast underclass of educators and researchers with little job security or institutional power has developed; thus, we suggest taking an anarcho-syndicalist approach, with emphasis on worker solidarity and collective action, may provide a framework for addressing these issues of labour exploitation and knowledge expropriation within the academy.

Anarcho-syndicalism's calls for a focus on direct action and mutual aid aligns with calls for more engaged and socially responsive and transformational forms of scholarship; not in an empty capitalist-conforming way, but in a truly radical and redistributive mode built on solidarity and sound research and teaching praxis. It resonates with principles of militant research (Halvorsen, 2015) and other forms of activist scholarship that seek to break down the barriers between the academy and civil society's struggles (Gramsci, 1996). It is crucial, however, that any new model of governance recognises the severe failings of the capitalist-academic model (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997) and that an application of anarcho-syndicalist principles to the academy and its governance must be informed by intersectional and decolonial perspectives. Moreover, in recognition of libertarian and individualist impulses once expressed by some purporting to be anarchists, which may advance the liberties of those physically strongest and those privileged by the system they find themselves in, and, where majority rule may result in the quelling of minority or vulnerable persons and limit state welfare, we see a reconfigured anarcho-syndicalism as a legitimate model for universities, which purportedly hold the intellect to collectively manage issues of vulnerability and empowerment from the ground up (c.f. Scott-Brown, 2024). We note here too that this paper does not aim to provide a deep examination and critique of anarcho-syndicalism theoretically, but instead sketch from it a set of transformative principles in the context of university governance.

Historically, labour movements, from which foundational elements of anarcho-syndicalism amidst other radical alternative modalities emerged, were sometimes characterised by race and gender exclusions (Crenshaw, 1991). To avoid the trap of collapse

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into brocialism (i.e., 'wait for your revolution until we have had ours' perpetuated by a vocal majority), the principles and practices of a new mode require critical examination, negotiation, robust research and theorisation, and idea-testing – a scholarly approach for scholarly workers. Moreover, a decolonial lens is essential for reimagining academic governance in ways that challenge the epistemicide perpetrated by western knowledge systems driven by colonial extractive capitalism (de Sousa Santos, 2015; Fraser, 2022). Decolonial thinkers, such as Mignolo (2011) and de Sousa Santos (2015), call for the radical restructuring of knowledge production and dissemination that centres marginalised epistemologies, itself often rendered as an impossibility by contemporary capitalist universities, and challenges the colonial power embedded in academic institutions. An anarcho-syndicalist model of academic governance, to be truly transformative, must incorporate both decolonial and intersectional thinking to work towards dismantling the colonial and imperial legacies that continue to shape higher education.

In this closing section, we consider a handful of practical transformations which would step us closer to such a model. This is by no means a complete framework, but rather a starting point for an ongoing dialogue about transformation of the academy. With that said, in practical terms, an anarcho-syndicalist approach to academic governance might involve the following:

Principle 1: Decentralisation of decision-making systems. By shifting power away from a vice-chancellor whose motivations are personal wealth and meeting KPIs set at the whim of a corporate-council, we replace top–down management structures with a system of federated assemblies. This is a call back to historic configurations of Academic Boards in traditional governance, but incorporates a stronger use of quotas to ensure intersectional voices are listened to, decisions are made through distributive voting, and fulsome transparency is maintained about the impact of decisions. This idea, itself not a radical 'new' way for higher education, is already supported by the clustering of disciplines into faculties and schools. Careful attention, though, is required to honour and action diversity and remove precarity. Practical examples:

- Transforming faculty and school clusters into decision-making assemblies with equal representation from academic staff, professional staff, students and community members.
- Implementing a digital platform for transparent, university-wide voting on major decisions similar to participatory budgeting processes used in some local governments.
- Establishing a process for a rotating chair system for these assemblies, ensuring diverse leadership over time.

Principle 2: Abolition of hierarchy. As governance practices and models are established to genuinely engage with distributive leadership and collaboration, the increasingly corporate management class, such as vice-chancellors, executive deans, directors and general managers, will need to be replaced with rotating, recallable delegates elected by the university community. Strict term limits, clear selection criteria, and robust transparency support a flattening of the hierarchy, and therefore a more equal distribution of funding (wages). Practical examples:

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- Instituting two-year term limits for all leadership positions, with a maximum of two terms served.
- Creating clear, community-developed selection criteria for each role, emphasising academic and community engagement experience over corporate management skills.
- Implementing a recall mechanism where a significant percentage of the university community can trigger a vote to replace a delegate mid-term.

Principle 3: Collective ownership. Universities in Australia are the property of the government (with limited exceptions) and are subject to the political whims and interests of government changes. Therefore, the institution serves the capitalist hegemon, as the capitalist hegemon controls government. Instead, static funding to institutions ought to be allocated and the transformation of the organisation of the university should be a worker-student cooperative. Students, staff and community members should share equal stake in the institution's governance and resources and ensure that the institution serves the society in which it operates. Practical examples:

- Negotiating with state and federal governments to establish long-term, stable funding agreements that guarantee autonomy.
- Creating a university constitution that enshrines equal voting rights for all members of the university community on major decisions.
- Establishing community trusts to manage university assets, with boards composed of elected representatives from staff, students and local community groups.

Principle 4: Solidarity. To ensure the institution serves the people, not the capitalists, our anarcho-syndicalist institution prioritises connections between universities and social movements. Areas of focus for research and teaching should be decided communally, and must account for the needs, interests and demands of the community at large, with benefit and possibility rested in the community's hands. This also demands breaking the 'ivory tower' idolised by capitalists and asserts facilitating engaged, socially relevant scholarship. Practical examples:

- As a transitionary practice, implement a requirement that 50% of a researcher's projects must include community partners and demonstrate clear social benefit.
- Establishing Community Advisory Boards for each faculty, composed of local activists, community leaders, and representatives from marginalised groups.
- Creating a system of 'community sabbaticals', where academics spend time working directly with community organisations as part of their workload.

Principle 5: Decolonial knowledge production. By centring marginalised epistemologies and ways of knowing, we can actively work to dismantle the coloniality of knowledge within the institution. This principle aims to challenge the dominance of western epistemologies and create space for diverse knowledge systems. Practical examples:

- Establishing Indigenous Knowledge Centres with equal status and additional funding compared to traditional faculties, led by Indigenous scholars and Elders.

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- Requiring all courses to include perspectives from non-western knowledge systems and scholars.
- Implementing 'decolonial review' processes for all new research projects, curricula, and recruitment and promotion processes.

Principle 6: Intersectional practices. It is important to ensure that governance structures and decision-making processes are designed to amplify marginalised voices and address intersecting forms of oppression within the academy. This principle recognises that individuals often face multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination and seeks to address this complexity in university governance. Practical examples:

- Implementing an intersectional quota system for all decision-making bodies, ensuring representation across axes of marginalisation.
- Establishing an 'equity impact review' process for all major university decisions and all new research projects, curricula and recruitment and promotion processes.

Many of these suggestions are drawn from the academy's very DNA. Distributive governance, public good and free inquiry have existed before. However, these were susceptible to greed, sexism, racism and anti-human thinking. What we propose, instead, is a system which genuinely holds plurality, diversity and collaboration as the strength of the system, with collective action as modus operandi of the academy – an academy for the people by the people.

While implementing these changes would undoubtedly dredge significant challenges, not least from entrenched power structures and the broader political economy within which universities are situated, as the contradictions and crises of the current system become increasingly apparent, the time is always ripe for bold reimagining of what academia and its institutions could be. An anarcho-syndicalist model, informed by intersectional and decolonial perspectives, offers one such possibility for transforming universities from sites of capitalist reproduction into spaces of collective liberation and knowledge creation for the common good.

Conclusion

At this prescient juncture in the history of higher education, the imperative for radical transformation is always never more urgent. The relentless march of capitalism into academia has not only reshaped the governance structures of our universities as factories for capital, it has fundamentally altered the very purpose and ethos of education. The corporatisation of university management, the commodification of knowledge, and the precarity imposed on academic labour have coalesced reshaping institutions that 'efficiently' and 'dutifully' manufacture capitalist labour, academics and students who remain ill-equipped to address the pressing challenges of our time. As global crises such as climate change, growing inequality, and the erosion of democratic norms continue to intensify, the need for universities to serve as bastions of critical thought and as catalysts for social change becomes ever more crucial.

The path towards a radical restructuring of academic governance is fraught with challenges. Extant deeply embedded power structures resist such transformative change.

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Rethinking Capitalist HE Governance

Moreover, the internalisation of capitalist logics within academia itself poses a significant barrier to reimagining our institutions from within. Yet, it is precisely because of these challenges that the work of reimagining must begin. The loose template for anarcho-syndicalism we have proposed offers just one alternative to the current paradigm. We have asserted that, by centring principles of collective ownership, decentralised decision-making, and solidarity with broader social movements, we may be able to reclaim the university as a site of critical inquiry and transformative action. The incorporation of decolonial and intersectional practices into this model is not merely an addendum, but a fundamental reimagining of what knowledge production and dissemination can look like in a truly pluralistic and equitable academic environment.

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