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Sydney Morning Herald

'Bodies in front of machinery': Parramatta Powerhouse hit by boycott

(in print as) 'Powerhouse move hit by union boycott'

By [Linda Morris](#)

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The Berejiklian government's \$1.17 billion plan to demolish two heritage buildings to make way for the new Parramatta Powerhouse has received a setback with the building and construction union, CFMEU NSW, adding its support to the public campaign to save the properties.

The union of Jack Munday, the crusading leader credited with saving The Rocks from redevelopment during the 1970s, says it will block any demolition work that damages the two historic buildings.

[The CFMEU says it will put "bodies in front of machinery" to protect the historic Willow Grove. *CREDIT: STEVEN SIEWERT*]

The union's intervention was announced as Parramatta residents warned they would be prepared to "put their bodies in front of machinery" to save Willow Grove and St George's Terrace.

But the NSW Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, through a spokesperson said: "Powerhouse Parramatta project will proceed. One-third of NSW's population is in western Sydney and they deserve to have an iconic cultural institution."

The heritage halls of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo will be shut to general public entry by the end of Tuesday amid rising public protest about moving the institution to Parramatta. The Wran Building and galleria, opened in 1988, will close in 12 months' time. Booked tours of the heritage halls will continue until the year's end.

The new Parramatta Powerhouse is scheduled to open in late 2024 on the banks of the river.

The Parramatta Powerhouse's Environment Impact Statement, now in the final week of public consultation, supported the demolition of the 19th-century Italianate villa Willow Grove, formerly a maternity hospital, and a row of terraces known as St George's Terrace.

The EIS found that in the Parramatta CBD, Willow Grove is "one of its kind" while St George's Terrace is the only remaining example of a terrace row in its architectural style and their loss would have a significant impact on the community's connection with heritage.

[To be demolished: St George's Terrace. *CREDIT: STEVEN SIEWERT*]

But the report prepared for Infrastructure NSW recommended the Parramatta Powerhouse proceed as the public benefits of western Sydney's first major, world-class cultural institution outweighed heritage concerns and loss of the local community's sense of place.

The union's secretary Darren Greenfield said the green bans meant no work could be done to destroy the sites.

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"As shown by the recent success of the Green Ban on the Bondi Beach Pavilion, the CFMEU won't stand by while local communities are ignored and important heritage sites are destroyed," Mr Greenfield said.

It's not the first time the union has opposed development in Parramatta. The union threw its weight behind the fight against major development of the Female Factory and the Parramatta girls' home in 2015.

The construction of the Parramatta Powerhouse is expected to generate 1100 jobs. Without the union's support construction can still continue but it is likely to be contested with pickets planned.

The North Parramatta Residents Action Group said the CFMEU's green ban on Willow Grove and St George's Terrace was a "tremendous win".

"Parramatta deserves a genuine museum and continued cultural funding from the State Government - but it does not need to be at the expense of more of Australia's heritage being destroyed," spokeswoman Suzette Meade said.

"Premier Berejiklian should be under no illusion if the destruction of Willow Grove or St George's Terrace commences people will be prepared to put their bodies in front of machinery."

The National Trust also strongly opposes the demolition of Willow Grove, a former maternity hospital, and St George's Terrace, both of which are listed on the trust's register as having irreplaceable and important historical value to the story of Parramatta.

Graham Quint, the trust's director of conservation, said Parramatta should have its own distinctive museum that was not founded on the loss of one of its beloved historic buildings and one of Sydney's cherished museums.