

Stop a rushed NTEU sellout at Sydney's Macquarie University!

Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee
9 July 2023

We, members of the newly-established Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee, warn that National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) officials seem desperate to finalise a sellout enterprise agreement with the management as quickly as possible.

The NTEU has called a members' meeting this Tuesday, saying: "Campaign at a crossroads." That suggests that critical decisions have to be made. But how can members do that when the union has provided no clear information?

The NTEU's July 6 email is contradictory. It says it has "reached in principle agreement" with management around most of "our key claims" and "a fair outcome is close."

Yet "lower order issues" are outstanding and "key matters" "remain unresolved." These include "pay," "fixed-term employment," "academic decasualisation" and "academic workloads."

But these are all crucial issues. What agreements have actually been reached? What is management demanding? And what is the NTEU offering to settle on?

The email says the union hoped to "achieve further progress" in negotiations with management on July 6, but nothing has been reported from those talks.

Also, according to the email, "management has been murmuring about negotiations being at a 'stalemate'." So is a "fair outcome" really close?

Or is this a threat to invoke the "intractable dispute" provisions of the Albanese government's new workplace relations laws? These laws can block industrial action and force workers into arbitration by the pro-employer Fair Work Australia.

The NTEU used that threat to push through a rotten deal at the University of Sydney (USyd) last month. That enterprise agreement, like the one at Western

Sydney University (WSU), was designed to facilitate pro-business restructuring, allow continued casualisation and inflict a sub-inflationary pay "rise"—that is, another real wage cut.

The USyd agreement opens the floodgates for a two-tiered academic workforce, with hundreds of new, teaching focused roles (up to 25 percent of the workforce), plus greater exploitation of low-paid post-graduate instructors.

In a June 26 email, the NTEU claimed to have "achieved important progress towards a better MQ." One of the "achievements" was: "We've made retrenchment and redundancy a last resort and strengthened the right to redeployment."

That actually means assisting the restructuring. As in the past, the NTEU would help management by pressuring staff members into taking so-called voluntary redundancies or accepting unfavourable redeployments.

At least 350 full-time jobs were destroyed that way at Macquarie in 2020/21, when the COVID-19 pandemic first hit. This was part of a wave of tens of thousands of layoffs nationally, expedited by the NTEU, that shocked and angered university workers.

The June 26 email also said: "We've achieved 70 new permanent jobs that will result in a 25% reduction in academic casualisation at MQ."

That does not add up. Although management hides the true figures, Macquarie has something like 2,000 casuals. So even if 70 were offered permanency, that would be nowhere near a 25 percent reduction. Instead, it would leave the vast majority in poorly-paid, insecure work.

In any case, there is no guarantee that existing casuals will get permanency. Management will retain the power to decide whether casuals are "appointable," pitting

casuals against each other.

According to the June 26 email: “We’ve secured limits on how often staff can be subject to workplace change proposals and improved change management processes.”

What limits? At WSU, the union claimed a “big victory” on the basis of restricting “change proposals” (i.e. job cuts) to one per staff member per three years. That only opens the door to forced redundancies.

Across the country, university managements are working with the unions to impose enterprise agreements that clear the way for further pro-business restructuring.

The NTEU says it wants to “consult” with its members on Tuesday, but at the last stop work meeting its officials blocked rank-and-file committee member Carolyn Kennett from calling for what is needed: a unified struggle across all universities.

The NTEU has still failed to answer an open letter from her, demanding an explanation.

Tuesday’s meeting will, whatever happens, restrict staff members in the narrow confines of what the NTEU thinks is possible in an EA, working with management. At the same time, we are being kept isolated from our colleagues in similar struggles across the country.

We demand that the NTEU make public all the details of its proposed terms of settlement with the management. We oppose the rush to push through a sellout! At USyd, members were made to vote on an “in principle” agreement that wasn’t even finalised.

In our committee’s founding statement we proposed demands based on what university workers and students need to ensure free first-class education for all, not the dictates of the financial markets and their governments. These demands include:

- reinstatement of all jobs eliminated by decades of funding cuts, including the thousands of jobs eliminated during the COVID-19 pandemic
- secure employment for all casualised university workers who want it
- pay increases surpassing inflation to compensate for past losses
- thousands of staff must be employed to guarantee that all university workers, both professional and academic, have reasonable workloads

We invite all staff members, whether NTEU members

or not, who agree with our demands to join the rank-and-file committee. We must initiate a broader fight to link up with workers facing similar struggles across the tertiary education sector and the working class more widely, in Australia and internationally, through the International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

To join the committee, or discuss forming a rank-and-file committee at other universities and schools, contact the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators’ network:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: [facebook.com/commforpubliceducation](https://www.facebook.com/commforpubliceducation)

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