

Vote No to an “in-principle” agreement at Sydney’s Macquarie University! Demand that the NTEU make public all the details of its proposed enterprise agreement!

Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee
1 August 2023

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has announced that it will try to push through an “in-principle” agreement with the Macquarie University management at an NTEU members meeting this Thursday.

An email on August 1, less than 48 hours before the meeting, has provided an “agreement summary” which reveals that a sell-out is being promoted.

We demand not just a summary, but that the full agreement be made available to all members of staff for at least a week before any vote is taken. That is essential to allow sufficient time for careful reading of the fine print, discussion among members and the development and circulation of counter-proposals.

With the NTEU putting forward an “in-principle agreement” to a vote without giving members the basic democratic right to properly examine it, we call for a “No” vote.

At the last NTEU meeting on July 11, a vote was passed to suspend all industrial action on the basis of supposed “significant progress.” Yet no details were offered of this “progress” beyond the vague claims already made in the union’s previous emails.

Numbers of members asked questions or raised concerns about the lack of detail. The August 1 summary still provides little detail on important clauses.

Despite NTEU claims of strengthened clauses, the summary shows that on matters of crucial concern to staff there are no advances. In fact, the various measures to address workload concerns of staff will lead to further workload intensification.

“Flexibility” in workload is for management to “deploy resources effectively and efficiently.” That is, flexibility for management, not staff. The conception of “Students First” is being used to impose greater workloads for the delivery of “quality teaching.” Innovation is being used as a tool for “efficiency.”

Workload committees, the mechanism by which work is allocated, will continue to be dominated by management.

The appointment of casuals to permanent positions contains no guarantees at all. All that is required is that current casuals be given “priority.” That is, current casuals can be bypassed in appointments. Management has free reign to move to external advertising for all positions. In addition, these new “secure” jobs are limited to 70 positions—far less than the hundreds that have been cut even in the past three years.

Further, the NTEU claims that a slight change in words from “does not intend” to “will” is “significantly stronger” when it comes to using casuals. In fact, this still means no actual constraint on the use of casuals at all.

Initially, the NTEU sought a restriction that a staff member be subject to at most one “change proposal” in the life of the agreement. As weak as this was, it has been further eroded to one change proposal each two years. Moreover, there are opt-out clauses for management under “exceptional circumstances” and for so-called voluntary redundancies.

This really means assisting restructuring—with retrenchments allowed “as a last resort.” As in the past, the NTEU would help pressure staff members to take

“voluntary redundancies” or redeployments.

At the July 11 NTEU meeting, NTEU representatives repeatedly declared that members must not demand too much from management and definitely not pay rises to match the soaring cost-of-living. The pay offer promoted by the NTEU is the same as that offered by management earlier this year, which equates to real pay cuts.

Over the life of the agreement, until June 2026, there is a pay “rise” of about 3 percent a year, roughly half the official inflation rate.

On July 11, the NTEU representatives insisted that if the members rejected a settlement that was acceptable to management it would invoke the new “intractable” dispute provisions of the Albanese Labor government’s workplace relations legislation. That would allow the pro-employer Fair Work Commission tribunal to impose an arbitrated outcome.

Rather than opposing these laws, the union reps sought to use the legislation as a weapon to intimidate staff.

NTEU senior industrial officer Josh Gava reinforced the union’s message. He claimed that the NTEU had achieved wins on new enterprise agreements at 15 other universities across the country.

The truth is that all the deals struck at other universities, including the University of Sydney, facilitate further pro-business restructuring. They allow continued casualisation, and open the way for new teaching-focused roles and greater exploitation of low-paid post-graduate instructors. They also inflict sub-inflationary pay “rises”—that is, deeper real wage cuts. They do nothing to curtail management’s prerogative to restructure and declare roles redundant.

This is the kind of deal that the NTEU is trying to enforce at Macquarie.

To take forward the fight at Macquarie we need to unite with our colleagues in Victoria and elsewhere who are taking strike action. The NTEU, together with the Community and Public Sector Union, has opposed any unified struggle by university workers. They are keeping us isolated, campus by campus, despite overwhelming votes for industrial action.

While the unions are pushing sellout deals at one university after another, the Labor government is continuing to starve universities of funds and demanding, via its Universities Accord review, that

they fully subordinate their teaching and research to the requirements of the corporate elite and the US-linked military preparations for war.

The only way forward lies in building rank-and-file committees, independent of the union apparatuses, so that university staff and students can take control of their own struggles.

Our Macquarie rank-and-file committee’s founding statement proposed demands based on what university workers and students need, not the dictates of the financial markets and their governments. These initial demands include:

- the 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
- the right to conduct research that is not influenced by the profit demands of corporate interests, government interference or the demands of the military apparatus
- academic freedom to research, speak and write without management, government or corporate censorship
- free first-class education for all students instead of channelling billions of dollars into preparations for US-led wars.

We urge all staff members who agree with our demands to join our rank-and-file committee.

To join our 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)

Twitter: [@CFPE_Australia](https://twitter.com/CFPE_Australia)



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)