

Reject the union sellout at Sydney's Macquarie University!

Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee
25 August 2023

Now that all the fine print has finally been released, it is clear that the staff agreements which management and the unions are trying to ram through at Macquarie University provide no protection from rampant casualisation and exploitation of fixed-term contracts, excessive workloads and significant job losses.

Furthermore, the proposed pay “increases” would do nothing to help workers facing rapidly increasing costs for housing, power and food. The rises average out at about 3.25 percent a year, from the end of 2021 until June 2026. Inflation has been running at above 8 percent and is still above 6 percent, so these are more real pay cuts.

The Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee urges National Tertiary Education Union members to reject the union's proposed enterprise agreement at the NTEU members' meeting called for Monday.

We urge all Macquarie academic and professional staff to vote no on any all-staff ballot held by the management on the rotten enterprise agreements it has struck with the NTEU and the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU).

At a totally undemocratic members' meeting on August 3, NTEU officials and branch representatives sowed as much confusion as possible to push through a motion to accept a vague “in-principle” enterprise agreement.

It was passed “conditional” on a further NTEU members' meeting in “approximately two weeks” to endorse the final written text. Now, nearly four weeks later, the NTEU is trying to bulldoze through acceptance of its deal, on the very eve of a management all-staff ballot.

- The casual conversion clauses allow the vast majority of jobs to remain casualised. Clause 13.1 of the proposed academic staff agreement says the

university will take “all reasonable steps” to achieve a 15 percent reduction in the proportion of the casual academic workforce, compared to the total academic workforce, over the three-year agreement period. “Reasonable steps” is meaningless. Even if a 15 percent reduction were achieved, that would still leave nearly 3,000 casual academic staff at Macquarie University.

- The university is proposing to advertise 50 Teaching and Leadership roles and 20 Teaching and Research roles over the life of the agreement (clause 13.1(b)), but it does not specify that these are continuing positions. Even if every one of these jobs went to staff already working as a casual academic at Macquarie, that would be roughly 1 job for every 50 casual academics.

- In addition, clause 13.4 states: “The **majority** of the positions established ... will be advertised, in the first instance, to casual staff who have worked at the University in the current or previous academic year.” After selection panels decide whether these casuals are “potentially suitable,” the university “**may** then determine whether or not to proceed to external advertisement.” There is no guarantee that current casuals would fill any of the proposed positions and even if they were successful, they would be subject to up to three years' probation.

- The agreement states that continuing contingent positions are no longer being restricted to research-only staff (clause 11.2). This opens the door to wider forms of contracts. Staff members could be terminated (without cause) if funds were no longer available for their role.

- For all staff members there are deep concerns about workload intensification. Despite the NTEU claiming a win on the composition of workload committees, there

is still free range for senior executives to stack the committees, and for executive deans to overturn their recommendations in any case (clauses 19.3 and 19.9).

· While the NTEU claims another “win” on workplace change, nothing could be further from the truth. Claims that no workplace will go through workplace change more than once every two years are a sham. Clause 47.2 clearly states that this “does not apply to voluntary redundancies or where exceptional circumstances arise, including substantial adverse changes in Government funding or major negative economic disruption.”

In other words, the management can claim exceptional circumstances and ignore the two-year requirement. Between 2019 and 2021, Macquarie shed 440 FTE staff through workplace change processes, including via “spill and fill,” which the unions assisted by encouraging staff to take so-called “voluntary redundancies.”

· Clause 47.5 offers the university everything it needs by alternatives to retrenchment, such as voluntary redundancy, or asking staff to take leave without pay or reduce the fraction that they work.

There are similar clauses in the professional staff agreement with the CPSU.

In 2020, as soon as the COVID pandemic hit, the NTEU shocked and angered university workers nationally by volunteering to assist the managements to axe 18,000 jobs and cut wages by 15 percent. This “Job Protection Framework” collapsed in the face of a rank-and-file rebellion, but the NTEU and the CPSU pushed through cuts to jobs and conditions via deals with individual managements, further discrediting themselves in the process and leading to declining memberships.

The NTEU and CPSU are once again preparing a sell-out of university workers at Macquarie University. This is part of a wider pattern of betrayal carried out by isolating their members, university-by-university, and striking retrograde agreements.

In every case, including at the University of Sydney, the deals impose sub-inflationary pay deals, facilitate further pro-corporate restructuring and allow mass casualisation to continue. They also open the floodgates for new teaching-focused roles and greater exploitation of low-paid post-graduate instructors.

This is in line with the agenda of the Albanese Labor

government. It is continuing to starve universities of funds, just as the previous Liberal-National government did. Via its Universities Accord review, it is demanding that universities increasingly subordinate their teaching and research to the requirements of the corporate elite and military preparations for war.

But resistance is developing. Even as the unions try to push through their rotten deal at Macquarie, staff at the University of Melbourne are launching week-long strike action on Monday to fight for decent pay and real de-casualisation.

Rejecting the sellout at Macquarie would be an initial step forward. There needs to be a unified struggle across the sector, reaching out to other workers, including our Melbourne colleagues, teachers and healthcare workers, for support and joint action. For that we need rank-and-file committees, completely independent of the union apparatuses.

As the basis for this struggle, we advocate the initial demands contained in our founding statement. These include:

- pay increases surpassing inflation to compensate for past losses
- the reinstatement of all jobs eliminated by decades of funding cuts and during the COVID-19 pandemic
- secure employment for all casualised university workers who want it
- the right to conduct teaching and research that is not dominated by the profit demands of corporate interests, government interference or the needs of the military apparatus.

If you agree with these demands, contact us to join our committee:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

Twitter: @CFPE_Australia



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact