

NTEU pushing sellout agreements at Sydney's Macquarie University

Our correspondents
1 September 2023

The Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee is hosting an online forum for university workers and students this Sunday at 4.30 p.m. (AEST) to discuss the retrograde enterprise agreements that the management and the unions are seeking to impose at Sydney's Macquarie University via an all-staff ballot next week, and the need to unite with the striking University of Melbourne workers for a broader struggle on job security, pay and conditions. See below for the details of how to register for the forum, entitled: "Reject the union sellout at Macquarie University! Unite with striking University of Melbourne workers!"

At a poorly-attended meeting on Monday, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) managed to push through a vote for its sellout enterprise agreements for academic and professional workers at Sydney's Macquarie University.

After minimal discussion, with NTEU representatives falsely presenting the enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs) as a "good deal," the union's deals with management were passed. Just 130 members voted in favour, with 4 against and 5 abstentions.

This vote represents a tiny fraction of the university's workforce of nearly 3,400 full-time equivalent staff, including casuals and those on fixed term contracts.

Just an hour after the meeting, the management announced a formal all-staff ballot to be held this coming Tuesday and Wednesday, September 5 and 6. That demonstrates the close collaboration between the unions and management. The other campus union, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) had already signed off on the retrograde agreement for professional staff.

The recently-formed Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee is urging all Macquarie academic and professional staff to vote "no" on the agreements, and to link up with their colleagues at the University of

Melbourne, who held stoppages all last week to fight casualisation and pay-cutting.

This would be a powerful step toward a broader struggle across the sector against the regressive deals being imposed by the unions, which cut real wages, allow mass casualisation to continue and facilitate further pro-business restructuring.

At Monday's meeting, NTEU representatives misleadingly asserted that the agreements at Macquarie contain better composition of workload committees, new jobs for casuals and improved "change management" (restructuring) clauses.

As the Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee pointed out in a detailed statement last Saturday on the fine print of the agreements, they provide absolutely no protections from rampant casualisation and exploitation of fixed-term contracts, excessive workloads and significant job losses.

At the meeting, the NTEU representatives also denied that the agreements amount to a pay cut. In reality, the proposed wage "increases" would do nothing to help workers manage the soaring costs of housing, power and food. The pay rises would 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 around 5 percent.

One staff member, Steven Hansen, who is associated with the pseudo-left Macquarie Socialists, spoke against the agreement, saying it was a real wage cut. But he urged those present to "get more involved in the union, we need you." He spoke of "rebuilding a militant union movement."

This is the opposite of what is required. It amounts to propping up the union apparatuses that have sold out every workers' struggle in every industry for decades. The unions have become industrial police forces for governments and business. What is needed is the building

of rank-and-file committees to take the power out of the hands of the union bureaucrats and link up with workers globally.

The NTEU and CPSU deals at Macquarie are not an aberration. They are part of a wider pattern of unions isolating their members, workplace-by-workplace, and striking retrograde agreements to meet the endless restructuring demands of employers.

In every case, including at Western Sydney University and the University of Sydney, the NTEU and CPSU 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 dovetails with the agenda of the Albanese Labor government. It continues to starve universities of adequate funding, just as the previous Liberal-National government did. And, via its Universities Accord review, it is demanding that universities increasingly subordinate their teaching and research to the requirements of the corporate elite and the AUKUS military preparations for war.

A Macquarie staff member, who wished to remain anonymous, spoke to us after the NTEU meeting. She said she had seen a steady deterioration in working conditions, particularly regarding workloads, and had bitter experiences with the NTEU in refusing to fight program closures and the dangerous reopening of the campus in the COVID-19 pandemic.

She commented on the methods used by the NTEU to push through sellouts. “Meetings were always rushed, with always the implication that we’re already lucky to have employment. They have an entourage of people that suck up to them, tell them: ‘Thank you so much for the hard work that you are doing, we’re so grateful to you for taking our concerns all the way up to management.’ So we’re made to feel that there is a risk of actually losing our job and all we can aspire to is keeping that job.

“In the last round of voting for the EBA there were many colleagues who kept saying, ‘This is not right, we have not been given enough time to understand what the agreement involves, we would like to push further with strikes. We can push for a better agreement.’

“All of that was swept under the carpet. People were expressing their objections and the chair simply ignored them saying: ‘Let’s move onto the vote because we don’t have enough time.’

“Even when it came to the vote, we were not told what we are voting for. There was a lot of discussion online.

Clearly there was confusion. The NTEU didn’t bat an eyelid. How are they not in cahoots with the management? The whole line is we must stick with ‘realistic’ solutions, that we should settle for what is a ‘realistic’ solution, not what members think is fair.”

As the basis for a unified struggle, based on what workers need, not what is “realistic” according to the union bureaucrats, the corporate elite and their governments, the Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee advocates the initial demands contained in its 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 and the need to build rank-and-file committees, completely independent of the union apparatuses, join the online forum tomorrow or contact us:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

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

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

[Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee online forum](#)

Reject the union sellout at Macquarie University! Unite with striking University of Melbourne workers!

Sunday September 3, 4.30 p.m. (AEST)

Register at:

https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_5CQyALj9RaGI1otguRemnQ



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact