

Rank and File Action Bulletin #1

Editorial: The case for escalation – Deepening the week 10 strike and fighting into 2023

After 14 months of negotiations, USYD management remain intransigent on our key demands. We haven't got guarantees on decasualisation or protecting professional staff internal hiring clauses. Management's attack on 40/40/20 academic workloads remains. And while we are struggling with electricity and food costs, they have yet to make a pay offer at all.

Redoubling the union campaign is our only serious option. We need to build the strongest possible support for our upcoming 48-hour strike on October 13 and 14, and as a union we need to confront anyone seeking to put their classes online. But given how far we are from seeing genuine movement from management, realistically we need a strategy for continuing the campaign into 2023, including curriculum bans, marking bans, and strikes in semester 1.

Strikes are building our power

Strikes have undoubtedly won us the main concessions we have extracted from management. We've stopped attacks on workload committees, had wins on flexitime, flexible working arrangements, and a workload panel for professional staff, and we are midway through negotiating a sick leave clause for casual staff!

We've seen big numbers of staff joining the NTEU, reaching our highest ever branch membership, and new members getting involved in the strikes, local area meetings, and leafletting. See reports in this bulletin on the growth of membership among Student Centre staff. The strong showing for the militant left in the NTEU branch elections also reflects the support for the strike campaign.

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However, staff are getting organised and getting vocal! We've managed to save at least one job, and are now campaigning for pay for casuals for the hastily-announced September 22 public holiday. Student Centre management used the fact that they had not released the work roster by the announcement of the holiday to refuse pay for any casuals. But members are campaigning that all casuals, especially those who normally work full-time hours, should be paid for that day. Staff have argued for this in every work meeting and at every opportunity and will keep up the pressure.

Left result in branch election a good sign

Rank and File Action (RAFA) are a group of NTEU members who believe in the importance of rank and file organising to build a fighting and democratic union. It is our only way to win decent work conditions and quality education for students.

RAFA ran in the recent USYD NTEU branch elections, winning 43% of the branch committee vote, and 7 out of 15 positions on the incoming committee. The other tickets received 4 positions each, with Thrive winning 31% and Fightback 26% of the vote. This is a strengthening of the left in the union. We'd like to thank everyone who got behind our campaign!

We're happy to report that David Brophy was successful in challenging for the position of Vice President (Academic Staff), and Finola Laughren won the race to be the new Casuals Representative on Branch Committee.

Get involved!

We need your help to make the campaign a success:

- Help us to leaflet the gates in the morning
- Volunteer for one of our lunchtime stalls
- Help walkthrough one a work area and talk shop!
- Print out a leaflet and poster for your work area
- Recruit your colleagues to the union
- Register for the picket line

Links available for sign up at this QR code.



Call out for next issue and contact RAFA

Do you have a report from your workplace area at the University of Sydney? RAFA would love to hear from you. Let us know the challenges you face, the types of conversations you and your colleagues are having, and your ideas to take the struggle forward by writing to: rafausyd@gmail.com, contact us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, or call Jean on 0449 646 593.

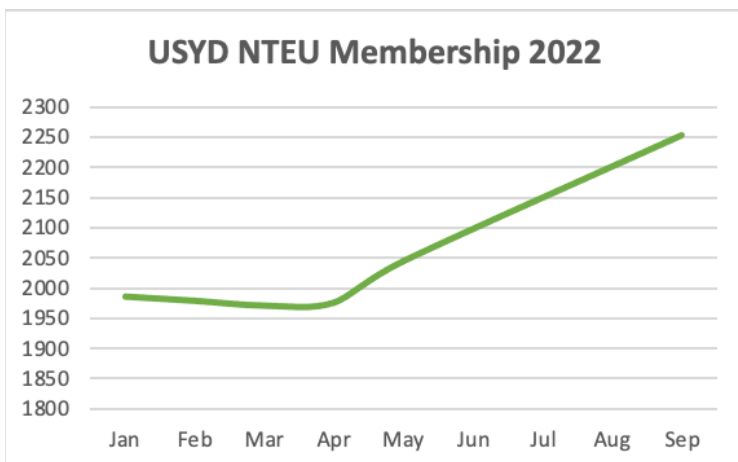
It is particularly inspiring to see permanent staff fighting on behalf of their casual colleagues.

There is now discussion about the feasibility of pickets at the Student Centre for the October 13 and 14 strike. We must stay strong and continue to convince colleagues to join the union, get organised and join us on the picket lines. That is the only way we are going to be able to stand up to management's bullying, to get better working conditions and to get permanency for casuals. – by a Student Centre staff member

Unfortunately, while receiving the highest first preference vote (38.1%) for the position of Vice President (Professional Staff), Dylan Griffiths went down to a narrow loss after the distribution of the Fightback candidate's preferences.

We take this outcome as a strong endorsement of RAFA's vision of a member-led, fighting branch - one that is deliberative and democratic, and that strikes hard with maximum solidarity and rank-and-file involvement. But we need to send the strong message that far more than just voting in an election or members meeting, we need every single member to help strengthen our EA campaign and organise the biggest possible strike we can on October 13 and 14.

We plan to build on the work we've done these past months to keep expanding the activist network in the branch, so if you share RAFA's vision, look out for future opportunities to get involved with us. Get involved with RAFA by contacting us.



Management playing hard ball

Our decision to strike for 48 hours on October 13 and 14 came after management's insulting offer on decasualisation, that forced NTEU bargaining reps to cancel the afternoon session on August 30. The union had put a claim for over 800 teaching-and-research jobs with entry pathways for casuals to redress the ongoing issues with casualisation.

In response to our de-casualisation plan, management attempted to dress up their original goal—the massive expansion of education focussed roles—as a response to the NTEU's demands. Management offered 200-250 new “predominantly education focussed” jobs, of which just 25% would give current casuals first-application rights. Not only does this fail to give casuals a meaningful pathway to employment, but management have also refused to budge on decreasing the 70% teaching workloads of these education-focussed positions. Casuals would have NO privileged access to balanced (40/40/20) roles. The threat of the upcoming 48-hour strike has increased management's offer to 300 jobs, but this does nothing to indicate a serious commitment to the creation of quality permanent academic roles to replace the work currently being done by casual labour.

The Week 10 strike is a key opportunity to force management to seriously move their bargaining position. See the back page for how you can get involved building the strike!

Stop Zoom strike breaking on October 13 and 14

While our strikes have ground on-campus activity to a complete halt, we know that management has attempted to weaken our industrial power by encouraging staff to teach on Zoom during strike days. Even one class running on zoom is one too many. If we want to hit back at the attacks on our conditions we need to disrupt online teaching.

We are calling on every staff member not to teach or work online during the strike. In the lead up to the Week 10 strike we also need to have hard discussions with colleagues who have taught before or are likely to teach during the strike. The unfortunate reality is that this decision will actively undermine the efforts of the union, and strengthens the power of management to continue on their path of wage theft, unsustainable workloads, and a decreasing quality of education.

Students and staff can anonymously report the details of classes scheduled during the strike here.



On top of this, students are planning disruptions of online classes on October 13 and 14. Students are collecting Zoom codes for classes that are scheduled with the intention of disrupting these. In the lead up to our week 3 strike this semester, students collected the Zoom links for 10 classes that were going ahead during the strike, entered these classes and broadcasted the picket-line into the class, opening up discussion about why classes should not be going ahead on strike days. Most of the classes were aborted. This model is being rolled out on a broad scale for October 13th and 14th.

If you would like support approaching colleagues about not strike breaking, contact us and we can do this collectively.

Campaign video advertising the campaign to stop Zoom strike breaking here.



February 2023 re-ballot to include marking and other bans

As it stands, there is a massive amount of distance between a fair agreement and the current offer. If we are to avoid a non-union ballot or sub-par agreement in the summer holidays, we need to be prepared with a clear strategy for the coming months and for potential action in 2023.

The branch has already started discussing running a new Protected Action Ballot (PAB) to widen the actions we can take to include a range of bans – including marking bans and work-to-rule (not working overtime).

Strikes remain the strongest display of unity of the branch. But bans on marking and releasing results or ‘flat marking’ campaigns (100% for everyone) are a serious escalation with the potential to create havoc for the university and the kind of crisis that can force further wins. We need to be prepared to win that ballot convincingly: having these bans on the table only increases our power.

If we’re serious about winning our demands, we need to be prepared to wreak havoc in 2023.

This means pursuing curriculum bans wherever possible to make the beginning of semester difficult. We should be prepared to use February 2023 to start calling around the membership to vote for the new bans. This should double as building a strike for early in the semester. This recipe of hitting 2023 with dates for strikes and a new ballot gives the best chance of mounting pressure, and supports the work of NTEU bargaining reps as they meet with management’s overpaid lawyers over summer.



What are we fighting for?

1. More than 800 academic permanent, quality jobs for current academic casuals

We need a serious reversal in the decades-old trend that has seen insecure blow out to 74% of the workforce (mostly casuals). We’re demanding hundreds of quality academic roles that are targeted to current casual workers, and a decrease in reliance on casual employment. Management are demanding they be education focussed roles, but we need these new jobs to include balanced (40/40/20) positions, and for casuals to have a genuine opportunity to win the roles.

2. Retain internal hiring and controls on overwork for professional staff

Management are continuing to pursue a massive attack on professional staff job security and career progression, by removing the priority internal advertising of vacancies. Management are serious about removing this right, and we need to campaign. We are also fighting to lengthen the professional staff redeployment period from 12 weeks, which is very low.

3. A pay rise above inflation

Having sacrificed and slogged during the COVID disruptions and lockdowns, we are now going backwards financially every pay packet, with the costs of food, petrol, rent and childcare continuing to skyrocket. For casual staff and those on lower pay brackets, we are currently forced to choose between heating our houses and buying groceries.

Inflation is currently 6.1% and Treasury forecasts it could reach 7.75% later in the year. This year it was revealed USYD has a staggering one billion dollar surplus, and the Vice Chancellor Mark Scott is on a one million dollar salary. We need a pay rise that accounts for the work we do and goes above inflation. We have argued for CPI+2.5% and that is what we need to keep fighting for – both inside the NTEU nationally, and in bargaining.

4. An enforceable First Nations employment target of parity with population

We are fighting for USYD to employ First Nations staff at representative population levels. We’ve won 7 days of cultural leave and some promises of increases, but management are still resisting the idea of targets.

5. Improved casual rights

We need to see serious improvements for current casuals. This means a real protection against wage theft and the abolition of piece rates. It means winning paid sick leave for casuals (so far management have only said they are “seriously considering” the idea). And it means winning equal 17% superannuation for casual staff.

6. And of course we need to stop management’s attack on the 40/40/20 workloads

Academic staff should not be coercively assigned to other allocations.

Student Centre staff members' meeting elects representatives

The Student Centre is an example for how union members can organise at the local level and build a stronger union. Our membership has doubled since the beginning of the strike campaign, and earlier in September we held our first members' meeting of the year where we elected four representatives to organise union work.

The Student Centre has a large and heavily casualised staff, and recently the union has been responding to casuals losing their work for no apparent reason. Management had previously indicated there would be ongoing work, and this lulled staff into a false sense of security that the contracts would be renewed, as long as they agreed to be available for three days a week and could work on campus. In fact, twenty new casuals were recently trained.

However, earlier this month a number of staff received generic emails informing them they no longer work at the Student Centre whilst they were completing a shift. Their upcoming shifts were suddenly removed from the roster. In at least some cases, there have been no responses to requests for explanation/feedback from management.

This is a kick in the teeth for our new casual employees who have worked hard over the past three to six months, and who have endured sparse work periods of three hours of work or even zero hours in a week during our off-peak periods. Casuals have also been receiving their weekly rosters with only a few days’ notice. (cntd. next page)