

1, 2, 3 for Victory!

We are left with no real choice but to wage a new offensive in 2023.

If we are to defend our current conditions, and to win a fair pay rise and decasualisation, we need to show management that we are serious, with an escalating series of strikes and bans. Vote for 1-day, 2-day and 3-day strikes if management refuses to move, and to start implementing bans around marking and overtime.

The semester-long escalation (1-2-3-bans) will act as a continuous threat hanging over management, giving them a reason to come to us with new offers unless they want more disruption.

So far, six days of strikes have won work-from-home rights, concessions on decasualisation, and stopped the worst attacks on academic workloads and research allocation.

But after over 18 months bargaining, we have not yet stopped management's biggest attacks.

Management's key attacks we wish to hold back:

- A pay "rise" of **3.34% per year** (a real pay cut of 5.6%);
- Continued attack on **40:40:20**, they are now threatening to use the service allocation to increase teaching up to 50% rather than decreasing research time;
- Want to remove **priority internal advertising** for HEO level 8, only conceding to NTEU demands for 1-7;
- Now say that **sick pay** for casuals is "harder and harder the more we look at it";
- Have decreased their target on **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** employment from population parity to 2% of employment;
- Wish to increase **education focussed roles** up to cap of 25% of non-casual teaching staff. Management want 1 EFR to every 3 balanced. The NTEU is demanding a ratio of no more than 1:4; and
- On **decasualisation**, we are demanding improvement on management's current offer of a 13% reduction in casuals plus 300 new jobs (including 100 balanced).

We don't want a protracted dispute; we need a timely victory. So 2023 can't just be a repeat of 2022; we need to escalate again and decisively!!

But we also need to actually deliver on escalation. There's no point voting for action so ambitious that members won't take it with us. We want every strike to be stronger than the last, and every action to be more well attended. We need everyone who votes for action to organise for action, with local workplace meetings and union recruitment.

The situation demands escalation, and this meeting should support escalation we can deliver on:

- Compressing last year's 6 days of strikes into one semester;
- Coordinating the week10 strike with a national NTEU week-of-action;
- Approving new work bans, such as flat-marking (a form of marking ban) and work-to-rule (overtime ban); and
- A new protected action ballot to allow new bans.

So vote to 1-2-3-ban, and get organising and recruiting to deliver a union victory ASAP.

Get involved here! Link to resources for joining RAFA, signing up for leafleting and poster for the Week 3 strike, and accessing NTEU materials:



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NTEU NSW at the cross-roads – the strategy we need to fight

This strike round in the NSW university sector is at a cross-roads with two strategies presenting themselves. The first comes from the rank and file activity at branches fighting for real improvements to the conditions of workers and the quality of education. The second is a defeatist approach which has been adopted at some official levels of the NTEU. University staff are at a crossroads for the future of the sector, in terms of work quality and education. Unless NTEU members understand what is at stake and organise to fight for real gains our wages and conditions will go backwards.

The “Official” Strategy

Some members, and apparently many officials see this bargaining round as mainly defensive, with the best possible result being very minor gains. They believe the union is weak, management is strong, and the conditions are not favourable for winning real improvements to redress the chronic over-work and exploitation being endured by NTEU members. This has led to a defeatist, defensive surrender-without-a-fight strategy being imposed on many campuses where the membership has lacked the organisation to oppose it. Their model is to (1) take some, often token/symbolic, industrial action, (2) accept large real pay cuts, and (3) trade this for small wins around decasualisation.

For example, at Western Sydney University, after only one day of strike action, workers accepted a 13.45% nominal wage rise, over a period where the RBA predicts around 18.85% increase to CPI. This is a predicted real wage cut of 5.4%. In return, management offered a 25% reduction in academic casual employment and the staggered creation of just 150 jobs. NTEU officials heralded this as a “historic win”. But the new jobs offer a tiny amount of research time, with a guaranteed floor of just 10% of workloaded hours dedicated to research. In other words decasualisation at WSU amounts to the creation of education focussed roles. Moreover, during 2020-21 staff at WSU was cut by 18%, including more than 250 permanent staff, and the agreement fails to secure 40/40/20 academic workloads.

The leadership is implementing the same strategy at UTS. After just two part-day strikes, the union’s national secretary Damien Cahill told a members’ meeting it would be disastrous for the

union nationally if UTS members wanted to “fight on.” The officials funded the ACTU call centre to call members to the meeting where the officials pushed to call off any further industrial action. Their motion was that an agreement that will create 110 new jobs, reduce casual academic work by 20%, and a 14.75% wage increase (i.e. a 4.10% pay cut over the agreement) would be “sufficient progress to not proceed with industrial action in December.” The motion claimed to be from the branch committee, but the motion had neither been seen, nor approved by the branch committee.

This industrial timidity has only emboldened university management at CSU, SCU and Curtin, to pursue non-union agreements. This approach has taken membership backwards at the other NSW branches, which have lost an average of 5% of the membership over 2022. It is not the only option.

The fighting alternative

A handful of NSW branches are marching forward with action. Newcastle University union members delivered a huge blow to university management everywhere when 82% of staff voted against a non-union ballot that would have seen huge attacks to workloads and pay. The University of Sydney has taken six days of strike action to fight an emboldened management. And members at Uni of New England are gearing up for industrial action after a historic 500-person ‘Convocation’ which called for the resignation of Vice Chancellor James Harris. The strategy of action has delivered these branches an average 11% growth in union membership.

The massive win against the non-union ballot at Uni of Newcastle shows the appetite for action of grassroots members. On December 15 University of Newcastle management put a non-union agreement to staff. The branch, which had held a very successful 24-hour strike in September, waged a strong NO! campaign. In a total humiliation for VC Alex Zelinsky 89% of academic staff and 75% of professional staff voted to reject Management’s non-union offer. The NTEU at Newcastle is now preparing for further strike action.

After six days of strike action, the NTEU at the University of Sydney are still fighting for sick pay for casuals, a real (above inflation) pay rise, and balanced academic roles, which combine research and teaching. This involves stopping management’s attempt to abolish the right for academics to have a 40% research, 40% teaching and 20% ‘service’ workload allocation. The branch is also fighting to...

NTEU NSW at the crossroads -the strategy we need to fight (cont'd)

increase the proportion of these balanced roles within the academic workforce which have fallen from 70% of academic staff in 2000 to just 45% by 2021.

However, even where branches are actively bargaining, there are still efforts from some union officials to limit or oppose industrial action. After 19 months of bargaining, USYD members voted to increase the scope for work bans, including 'flat marking' and marking bans, which would need a further 'Protected Action Ballot' of all members to be ruled legal.

But the NSW Division has been reluctant for the ballot to go ahead. . While they were happy to provide funds to the ACTU call centre to help call the UTS campaign to a close, they have so far refused to fund the call centre to support calls to get this PAB over the line, successfully defeating a RAFA motion to state council. This attitude will need to change if the USYD branch's industrial strategy is to be optimized.

In 2017, in USYD's last round of bargaining, even though momentum was growing for further action to win casual workers sick pay, the ACTU call centre was used to mobilise the biggest mass meeting of the campaign, not to build momentum for the strikes, but to vote to settle. This was such an unnecessary defeat for the branch. Many good union members became disillusioned by the strategies being pushed by the state and national NTEU and dropped out of activity. But the same ingredients of defeat are being brought together again outside the USYD branch

We need an urgent debate about strategy among union members across the state. The organisation and strength being shown by the USYD and Newcastle branches shows that staff want a serious fight to defend their conditions and pay. But winning these requires building on the willingness to fight, maximising rank and file control of disputes/bargaining and explicitly opposing any strategy that is pushing for rapid settlement of agreements that trade below inflation pay increases for minimal numbers of education focussed jobs.

The week of action in April/May provides an opportunity to build solidarity across the NTEU branches to support the industrial action that can win real pay rises and secure jobs.♦

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.



What are we fighting for?

1. A pay rise above inflation

Management have offered a pay rise of just 3.3% per annum (expiry to expiry), a real pay cut of 5.6% though are presenting it as higher by ignoring the pitiful pay during 2 years of bargaining. We'd need 4.4% per year just meet predicted inflation; this offer amounts to a real pay cut, from 2021 to 2026.

Management had a billion dollar operating surplus last year and must do better!!!

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. Winning a secure academic workforce.

We are fighting to change the nature of the academic workforce where balanced roles have fell from 70% to 45% of roles since 2000! We need to stem the tide and turn it back.

We're demanding an absolute cap on education focused roles, with no more than 1 EFR to every 4 balanced (not 1:3 as management wants). Management have agreed to reduce the casual workforce by 13% and create 300 permanent jobs, but we need better. We're demanding a minimum of a 20% reduction, and 500 jobs for casual staff.

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 promised increases. But management have revised down targets from population parity to 2%. We need to fight to bring management back to the table seriously!

5. Sick leave for casuals & no wage theft

We need to see serious improvements for current casuals. Management once told us they were "seriously considering" sick leave for casuals, but now they say it's getting "harder and harder" the more they look at it. We desperately need to fight for sick leave for casuals. This means a real protection against wage theft and the abolition of piece rates, which we're still negotiating.

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

We've stopped management coming after the research allocation, but now they are attack research. They want the right to assign 10% of the 20% service allocation to teaching, meaning a massive increase to the teaching load from 40% to 50% of time! This is another attack on academic workloads, and must be stopped.

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.

We've reached our highest ever membership, and new members are getting involved in the strikes, local area meetings, and leafleting.

USYD NTEU Membership 2022

