

Four bad arguments against the strikes (cont. from inside)

1. From the heights of their enormous salaries, the VC and Provost claim to care about the cost-of-living pressures we're under – but they're denying us a real pay increase that the \$1bn+ surplus shows they could certainly afford. At the same time, they're hoping that the pay lost by striking will prevent more and more of us from supporting the campaign. So we sometimes hear the argument that the amount we forgo by striking is greater than the amount we gain in the pay increase we're strike for. We're not at that point yet – but, even if we were, the argument would still be completely wrong. It ignores the fact that the pay rise we negotiate this year sets the floor for all subsequent increases in every future year of the agreement (by compounding), and in all the Enterprise Agreements to come. And it conveniently forgets that we're not just fighting over pay, but over workload, the right to work-from-home, decasualisation, and other fundamental workplace rights. You can't put a price-tag on these. The longer the campaign goes on, the more union members have access to the industrial defence fund to help cushion pay lost by striking.

2. Management also want us to believe that strikes are ineffective because non-members do their work from home anyway, on Zoom and Teams. That's also wishful thinking. Shutting down the campus with pickets affects every single staff member. When our non-union colleagues are strongly advised to work from home when we strike, there's no way they can't know that there's a serious dispute underway. On their own, our pickets demonstrate that management can't guarantee the smooth running of the university – and that's without even taking into account the sheer volume of work that's cancelled or delayed when union members strike. It's not a surprise that management have tried every trick to prevent strikes happening, including legal intimidation, their many aggressive emails, and exploiting Australia's deeply hostile anti-union laws.

3. We also hear a lot about how industrial action should take the form of bans or work-to-rule instead of strikes. The branch has analysed this question deeply, and consulted extensively with members about it. It's simply not clear that bans are more effective than strikes.



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.

Bans can play a useful complementary role with strikes, but they simply cannot replace them. In fact, the more effective bans, such as marking bans, require the threat of strike action in return for any management retaliation that may ensue. An additional hurdle is the process of balloting for bans (a "Protected Action Ballot", or PAB), a requirement of Australia's anti-strike laws. Senior NTEU officials have refused point blank to support our ballot process, or to help fund calls to all members, which has put the branch in a difficult position. The branch committee has yet to trigger the PAB and needs mass participation from members to win the ballot and implement the bans. In any case, at the moment, strikes are the option we have.

4. There's a final argument we sometimes hear against the campaign – that union meetings are only attended by a minority of members, and that this is because the majority of unionists don't actually support what we're doing. This argument is common – which is curious, since there's no hard evidence for it. If it were true, we'd expect the membership of the branch to be falling – but, in fact, it's going up. We'd also expect to hear significant complaints – but we don't, and, in fact, our most recent strike was the best-attended to date. The member survey we conducted earlier in the year also gave us no reason to think that members' resolve is flagging. And USYD has some of the biggest members' meetings in the country. It's obvious that not everyone can come to every, or even most meetings – but that doesn't mean that the support isn't there, or that a large number of members don't regularly come to meetings when they can. The support makes sense: why would union members want a pay cut, heavier workloads, and fewer rights at work?

So there's no need for defensiveness or apologies when discussing the campaign with our colleagues. How high the support for the campaign is partly depends on how we talk about it. Confidence and determination are infectious – as are complacency and defeatism. So let's present our campaign as it is – the best chance we have for justice at work, well worth the effort and sacrifice we put into it, and an inspiring rebuke to the managerialist, market-driven vision of the university that's so destructive for us, for students, and for public education.

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No pay—no deal: fight on to week 6 strikes

Management say that strikes don't do anything, but if this campaign has proven anything, it's that this is simply not true.

After months campaigning and strikes, we have extracted three hard-won concessions:

- Pay for all hours work for casual staff;
- 5 days per year of sick pay for casual staff;
- Extended notice period for professional staff redeployment.

But the kicker is a tricky poison offer on the 40:40:20. Management have given us an all-or-nothing ultimatum. **They'll give us 40:40:20, but only if we sign off on** an academic package with a 25% EF cap! This amounts to **tripling the Education Focussed workforce** from 220 to 650, with only some limited protections (a right to convert after 5 years, and some workload protections).

Why not postpone the strikes?

We haven't really won the 40:40:20 until it's on terms we should accept. And moreover, if we call off the strike without the wins it was designed to obtain, we take the wind out of the campaign sails and set ourselves up for saying yes to whatever pay offer management comes to us with.

We *have* made a lot of gains, on things like leave, workload regulation, flexible work and work from home rights, and others. But the only major **new wins** are on sick pay, wage theft & extended notice period. This is great progress, but it's just not sufficient for postponing a strike, harming the building we've already done, and de-mobilising members. For now, we need to fight on.

The massive expansion of education focussed roles will entrench a two-tiered system that will railroad opportunities for early career researchers.

The package also comes with:

- 20% decasualisation (up from 13%);
- 330 early-career continuing academic jobs, including 110 balanced positions;

And on top of that, until we agree, they say they won't improve the 3.3% pay offer, or bundle in the package some of our other key demands like First Nations Employment Parity, no to CET job cuts and Internal Advertising Rights for professional staff. Even worse, they refuse to say what kind of 'improvement' they're prepared to make on pay.

We cannot fall into this management trap.

We have to say:

- no to the latest package without a pay offer;
- no to the unprotected expansion of EF staff;
- no to separating pay, First Nations rights & general staff rights from academic rights.

We want to bargain in good faith for a whole new agreement, with all cards on the table.

No to the package; and go ahead with the week 6 strikes. Talk to your colleagues and make week 6 a resounding success!

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Student Centre spill and fill

Student Centre NTEU member

Last week, the Student Centre’s casual HEO4 employees were advised that their contracts would not be extended upon their expiry on 31 March.

At the same time, 20 fixed-term full-time HEO4 Student Centre Assistant positions have been advertised internally AND externally. Given these roles are the same as those filled by the Student Centre’s current HEO4 casual cohort, it is a slap in the face that these are being externally advertised at all.

A further 30 casual positions – roles analogous to those of the current HEO4 casuals – had been advertised to current University of Sydney students at HEO3 classification. It seems that this advert - which was in breach of the Part D of the Enterprise Agreement - was deactivated, potentially due to NTEU interventions.

Regarding the HEO3 advert, management’s motivation could not be clearer: save \$7/hour worked per each casual worker and activate the student minimum one-hour engagement clause (non-students have a stipulated minimum engagement of three hours).

Let’s call this restructure by its name: cost-cutting from the management of an institution that turned a \$1.04 billion surplus in the last financial year.

The current group of Student Centre HEO4 casuals are not dispensable.

The University could not function without them. If it weren’t for the tireless work of Student Centre HEO4 casuals, academic staff would be teaching in empty classrooms!

A rally has been organised for Thursday 23 March in support of the Student Centre’s HEO4 casuals. In an apparent response to this rally, Student Centre management has moved most permanent staff to WFH for the day and cancelled the majority of HEO4 casual shifts for that day. Further updates to the Student Centre roster on 21/03 suggests that the HEO4 casuals have also had their shifts on 29 and 31 March cancelled.

This is a shameful assault on Student Centre casuals – workers whose job security Student Centre management claim to be promoting. It is plain and clear that management is striving to atomise Student Centre workers from supporters rallying to their cause.

The Student Centre shows what solid union organising can do, growing from 18 to 32 members in the last two weeks! We need union activists in every work area, connecting the EBA to local struggles, and building fighting union strength!



Read the NTEU position on the problems with unstrained EF roles

- Workloads: Education-focused staff are usually heavily overworked and experience significant workplace stress. Many EFRs are exhausted. Their 70% teaching workloads are unsustainable.
- Autonomy: Academics can already increase their teaching workload by consent. Management’s new proposal is to appoint people into teaching-heavy positions and then put a five-year limitation on the ability to transition to a balanced role.
- Progression: We’ve won the right to convert for EF staff, but only after 5 years. We don’t want a permanent underclass of academic staff.



Follow link for full text

FMH report: strike on campus to work from home

FMH NTEU member

Transitioning suddenly to work from home (WFH) when COVID hit was a challenge for all of us, but staff stepped up to keep the University running, and many staff found that their jobs could be done just as well from home, with all the side benefits WFH can bring.

However, the Faculty of Medicine and Health (FMH) has recently directed many professional staff in the Education team that their mandatory in-office days are being increased from 3 to 4 days. Three days was already excessive, and a move to 4 days is a slap in the face to staff whose roles require a bare minimum of face-to-face interaction. Management also want individualised flexible work arrangements: staff who have faced this (e.g. at the student centre) can attest that this only establishes a two-tier system, breeding favouritism and resentment and a loss of staff solidarity.

This also flies in the face of assurances in bargaining and by the Provost that the University is supposedly committed to WFH rights in a post-COVID world.

Staff were not consulted on these changes, and were given vague and clearly disingenuous justifications such as "team cohesion", "cross-collaboration", and "reliable internet".

Recently an open letter with over 100 signatories of FMH professional and academic staff and

NTEU branch committee members was delivered to the Dean. Staff expressed their disapproval and requested consultation politely and reasonably, but management have embarked on an offensive of intimidation tactics - accusing staff of clandestine behaviour, pulling staff into intimidating individual meetings with upper managers, trying to get them to rat out their colleagues involved with the letter, and other similar tactics. This is especially shameful for an institution that claims to value “robust and respectful debate”.

Groups of staff are now refusing to meet with management until their concerns can be addressed collectively in a neutral open forum. Union membership is skyrocketing and further escalation is on the table if management continue to refuse to engage in good faith.

FMH professional staff also had a strong showing on the pickets on March 9, and are building for an even stronger showing for the next strikes, to demonstrate that they can work from home or they can strike on campus!

Download the FMH poster here!



Four bad arguments against the strikes

Nick Riemer

We’re now in the longest strike campaign that the NTEU has ever run anywhere, fighting an employer that’s still determined to railroad through serious attacks, while also wanting to make us swallow a pay cut.

Any campaign will always have to justify itself against critics – mostly non-members and management – who are out to discredit unionists prepared to fight for their rights. At the start, that took the form of arguing that strikes were unnecessary, futile or counterproductive. Over twenty months into the campaign, it’s impossible to doubt that, more than anything else we do, it’s our strikes that generate a crisis on campus,

politicise our colleagues, and raise the question of rights at work in a way that affects everyone. If we felt the strikes were pointless, it would be madness to continue them. The fact is that, without them, we wouldn’t have made the progress we’ve made so far. That progress is real, but it’s been slow – as we’d expect with our stubborn management, who are showing exactly the same hostility in the EA campaign they show in all other serious industrial conflicts on campus, like change proposals. On matters as fundamental as pay and workload, they won’t offer us any concessions they’re not pressured into.

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