

Why casuals should strike

Casuals have strong reasons to strike this bargaining round!

By Finola Laughren

We are fighting for 17% superannuation for casuals to bring casual super into parity with other staff, which is important in terms of the basic principle of equality, but is also a matter of gender justice since women and minorities are more likely to be in insecure forms of work.

Another gender justice issue we're fighting for is the extension to casuals of 30 days of gender affirmation leave, which we won for continuing staff last round.

Most basically, we are fighting for genuine decasualisation in order to protect and improve academic working conditions at the university.

Last round, despite management's intransigence, staff taking nine days of strike action resulted in some important wins for casuals: five days of sick/carers leave, 330 continuing positions, with 25% allocated to long-term casual and fixed-term staff, and stronger conversion rights.

This round, management is again seeking to wedge casuals against other sections of the workforce with an eye to undermine 40:40:20 as the standard model of academic work. Management's *Secure Academic Employment Package*, which attempts to frame job security and paid research as mutually exclusive by proposing to create a new suite of teaching-only positions, is its latest attempt at denying casuals the working conditions they deserve

(and students the learning conditions they deserve).

Our collective response must be to strike for casuals who have contributed years of service to the university to be converted into jobs that properly account for the full range of tasks and duties associated with academic work. The fight for a genuine program of decasualisation is not just relevant to casuals, however, but is rather part of a broader fight to prevent the further entrenchment of an already two-tiered academic workforce that places increasing pressure on all staff to do more with less: less pay, less time, less security and less respect.

Defending 40:40:20 as the standard model for academic work is not about privileging research over teaching. It is about recognising that teaching and research are interconnected, and ensuring that academics are workloaded and resourced adequately properly to do both. Casuals should strike, all university staff should strike, to send management the clear message that the pathway out of the crisis of casualisation is 40:40:20 job creation.



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Build maximum participation for the 24-hour strike!



As we gear up for a 24-hour strike on Wednesday 2nd September, management remains strongly opposed to our key demands such as protections around AI, balanced teaching/research roles for academics, workload and restructure protections for professional staff, 17% super for casuals, and shamefully, still refuses to enshrine freedom of speech in the EA (see *David Brophy's bargaining update*).

To shift management's position, we must ensure our strikes are well-attended and our pickets are strong. Energy, participation and widespread understanding of our aims will be key to our success. That means conversations with our workmates, union posters in our work area, and volunteering for the morning leafleting sessions (see the QR code). We won't win a 20% pay rise without a militant mobilisation, no matter how righteous our claims are!



sign up to build the strike!

Wear your union colours!

This Wednesday, one week out from the strike, the NTEU is asking all members to wear their badges, lanyards and t-shirts, in a show of union visibility. There will also be a

recruitment and poster stall outside Susan Wakil Health Building 12-2pm. Come along and stock up on materials or bring along a colleague who is thinking of joining the NTEU.

We must build a campaign that doesn't stop after 2 September, but escalates throughout the semester. That means future stop-work meetings to discuss developments in bargaining, more strikes (including the possibility of 48-hour and 72-hour strikes), and a ban on the transmission of exam results which could cause chaos for University systems.

If we can connect with the widespread distrust of management, cost-of-living pressure, and the desire to make our workplace fairer and better for students and staff alike, we can ensure a lively campaign that develops grows and wins!

You can help by attending or setting up a workplace meeting, and attending the **next members' meeting** on **Thursday 27 August at 1230pm in Chemistry Lecture Theatre 1 and on Zoom**, to hear a further bargaining update, plan the strike. Members should feel confident to share the ideas and experiences.

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. Write to rafausyd@gmail.com, visit [@rafausyd](https://www.instagram.com/rafausyd) on Instagram, or call Matte on 0404654757

Bargaining update:

By David Brophy

NTEU members are now organising for a strike on Wednesday, September 2. I'm one of the 6 USyd staff endorsed to represent union members in the ongoing enterprise negotiations. I thought I'd share my perspective on where we're up to in bargaining, and why I think this strike is necessary.

In short, we're still far from having the basis for a decent deal in front of us. It'd be irresponsible of us to think that we can move towards finalizing, without significant movement from the other side. I won't give a full bargaining wrap-up here. But a few key points from our negotiations in the last fortnight.

Right now, we're still looking at no meaningful protections or consultation on the introduction of AI. The University has told us that they're unwilling to even give us the same consultation rights that universities elsewhere have signed off on.

The University is still insisting that to move forward on decasualisation, it requires a new category of ultra-heavy teaching roles (70-80%). We've argued that introducing some flexibility into the education-focused category is more than enough to meet their needs. They've haven't agreed to that, and are insisting on creating what will be little more than a second-class teaching drone (e.g. no promotion pathway).

To remedy the decline in teaching & research roles as the norm of academic work, the union has settled on the objective of introducing a floor on 40/40/20. That is, to lock in a basic minimum percentage of academic FTE at 40/40/20. It's time we put a stop to the continual erosion of the teaching-research nexus. The University has so far refused to accept this. Their claim has been to eliminate the cap on EFRs – potentially opening the door to the complete disappearance of 40/40/20 at the University.

On academic and intellectual freedom, we've been trying hard to close what we see as loopholes in this section of the agreement, which we feel put staff at risk in the current environment. Almost all our substantial changes to strengthen these protections have been rejected.

This isn't a full run-down. We're still negotiating across significant divides on academic workloads, managing change, disability, etc. We're yet to get to pay: the University has traditionally insisted on not tabling their pay proposal until the closing phase of negotiations.

Suffice it to say, at the end of the most recent bargaining sessions (4 day-long meetings in a fortnight), none of us on the team could see any grounds to modify the plan that NTEU members have endorsed for a strike on September 2. We're meeting again with the University this week, but for now, it's time to get engaged in this dispute. For all that there has been some genuine back-and-forth on certain points, there are very different visions of the future of university work clashing at the bargaining table. It's a good time to show which side you're on.



Are you a permanent academic staff member or graduate of USyd? Sign the Convocation on Gaza letter



Sign up to RAFA at rafaussyd.com

Disciplined strikes: our pathway to success

by Caitlin Erbacher

Strikes are by far the most impactful tactic at the union's disposal. They are a manifestation of the power that we hold as workers when we stand together. They make visible the hidden reality underpinning the capitalist economy—that labour is the source of all value. Management would like to see us isolated from one another and alienated from the value that we produce, because this makes us easier to control and exploit. By contrast, we are at our most powerful when we organise to collectively withhold our labour, because this stops the flow of profits from workers to bosses and shareholders.

Even though the University isn't strictly profit-making business, it plays an important role in the capitalist system, providing skilled workers for all sorts of tasks required for the capitalist system like engineering, healthcare and teaching. Further, it has become increasingly a site of for-profit corporate partnerships including for the aerospace and weapons industry. University strikes put pressure on management's corporate agenda, and call into question the federal government's funding cuts to higher education, raising the question about what universities are supposed to be for. In the current round of enterprise bargaining at the University of Sydney, the strikes gives weight to the NTEU's demands, creating material consequences for management should they continue to ignore us and negotiate in bad faith. It is this power that has enabled every major achievement of the global labour movement, from the 8-hour day and weekends, to sick leave and the minimum wage.

However, a strike is only as strong as its weakest picket line. To be effective, it requires maximum participation from union members and, ideally, solidarity from students, other unions, and the broader community. "Scabbing" (i.e. working during a strike, even remotely) directly undercuts the impact of industrial action, enabling the University to continue operating and generating profits with minimal disruption. This allows management to simply "wait us out", trusting that our members' will to fight will dwindle before their resources do. By contrast, a strong and disciplined strike with clearly articulated demands has the power to break through stalemates at the bargaining table and win

major concessions such as: improved research rights for academic staff (we are arguing for a floor on 40/40/20 positions), the 17% superannuation for casuals, the unambiguous freedom of speech clauses, and the 20% pay rise that we are demanding.

Given the highly repressive legal environment that the Australian labour movement is forced to operate in today, with layers and layers of red tape that must be navigated before industrial action can be taken, a strike is both a product of direct union democracy and a demonstration of the militancy of our members. It is the ultimate manifestation of the union, not as a bureaucratic organisation run by paid officials (no matter how dedicated and hard working), but as a grassroots movement of rank-and-file workers and activists.



Beyond this, a strike is a festival of solidarity and practical education in industrial principles. Workers often report feeling energised and empowered by their experiences on the picket line. By contrast to the often-demoralising experience of wage labour under capitalism, during a strike, workers are able to exercise real autonomy over their lives, and to have a hand in shaping the future of their workplace. Expressions of support from the wider community—whether in the form of students and other unions joining us on the picket line, or the jubilant honking of horns and cheers from cars as they drive past—are genuinely heartwarming and motivating. Join us on the picket line, connect with other union members, and help us build a better University for all.

sign up for the picket lines via nteu.info/usydstrike

