

Strikes work: we must continue with our escalating campaign

By Nick Riemer

There seems to be next to no chance that Enterprise Agreement negotiations will be able to be finalised this year. Management continue to block agreement on too many major issues, including job-security and AI, freedom of expression on campus, salary, workload, and the teaching-research nexus. Members have voted to engage in an escalating campaign of industrial action in pursuit of a fair agreement. This is exactly what we now must do, with the first semester of 2027 now offering the best opportunity for serious escalation.

Strikes need more than fiery rhetoric

Decisions about the nature and timing of industrial action are important and need to be made with care. There are two main dangers: one that comes from a radical position, and another – more serious – that comes from a conservative one. We respect and gladly work with comrades of both tendencies – but we disagree with them strongly.

The radical danger is the belief that the branch's ability to strike is a permanently available resource that can be turned on and off at will. This should be the case, but – regrettably – it just isn't. Successful strikes – ones that are widely observed and that empower members – need to be built. Every successful action is the fruit of weeks of preparation and effort by volunteer member activists. There is more to a successful industrial campaign than fiery speeches in members' meetings. The desire for a successful strike and the willingness to go on strike oneself are not enough. When we call industrial action, we must be prepared to do the concrete work needed to make it a success by bringing others with us.

Resisting the nay-sayers

The conservative danger is far more serious. Conservative comrades are risk-averse and dislike the inherently uncertain nature of industrial action and the risks that it involves. They are far more sensitive to our disadvantages than they are confident in our strengths. They project their own hesitancy and risk-aversion onto the membership in general, always telling us that 'ordinary members' aren't on-board. Regardless of meeting attendance or volunteering rates, the glass is always half empty.

Our conservative comrades tend to see calls for assertive industrial action as irresponsible or hot-headed. They seriously overestimate the risks of going on strike. They do not understand that a picket is more like a blockade than an opinion poll. So even if pickets are strong enough to completely close the campus, they tell us that they were disappointing, or even a failure, because not every member came out on them. This is the only union activity where they apply this reasoning.

Conservatives accept management's measures of the strike's success as authoritative, so when someone from management tells them that only x-many people declared themselves to be on strike, they see this as knock-down evidence that the strike was a failure – no matter how deserted the campus was, no matter how many classes were cancelled or meetings rescheduled.

Fundamentally, despite their often fiery words, conservatives are not confident in members, and they are too ready to sign away our rights in a spirit of 'realism' or 'pragmatism'. Sometimes, they tell us that we need to sign the agreement, because enforcing the agreement is the most important task. They're right: enforcement is important. But, all too often, conservatives are nowhere to be seen when the actual work of enforcement has to be done.

Next steps

Our branch is experienced in successful industrial action. A good strike unites us. So we cannot indulge in pessimism, defeatism or fatalism. As the year winds down, we should plan serious escalation. In particular, we should discuss the possibility of striking while marks are being processed. Interrupting mark-delivery is arguably the most powerful weapon we have, and we should find ways to use it.

Management's vision is for a university where unfettered AI-use replaces jobs without constraint, where we are made to work more while our pay goes backwards, and where we do not even have freedom of speech to contest this, let alone to express ourselves politically on questions like the genocide in Palestine. Assertive industrial action is good for the union, for the university, for students and for us. Get involved with RAFA to join a group of committed unionists determined to make the fullest use of our industrial power.

Rank-and-File Action (RAFA) Bulletin

Issue No. 17, Tuesday 13th of October, 2026



Vote to continue the strikes!



On the eve of today's members meeting Peter Chen and incoming branch president John Buchanan sent a perplexing email to all members asking us to defer the 22nd of October strike. Peter and John have done this without consulting the Bargaining Team or Branch Committee, or giving the membership time to circulate an alternative case. With no significant progress made in the recent bargaining meetings, deferring the strike would be a huge mistake! It would send the wrong message to management and we would lose hard-won momentum.

Peter and John seem to think that the branch is not ready for another strike. There is no good evidence for this. While more activism is needed to ensure our success, we can see that members are gearing up to strike, and getting involved by joining local area meetings and organising for today's stop work meeting. Our activity is trending upwards and we can use this to make our next strike even better than the first.

VOTE YES FOR THE MOTION TO STRIKE ON 22 OCTOBER!

This meeting notes:

- 1. As part of its commitment to an escalating program of industrial action, the NTEU USyd branch voted democratically to strike at a quorate members' meeting on the 24th of September.**
- 2. The alternative motion was proposed without any prior discussion with either the bargaining team or branch committee.**
- 3. Since our last members' meeting, insufficient progress has been made to justify postponing the strike. There remain outstanding issues that threaten the working conditions of staff, and the future of the university as an educational institution.**

This meeting therefore:

- 1. maintains the 24 hour strike on the 22nd of October.**
- 2. calls a members' meeting in week 12 (the week beginning the 26th of October) to facilitate democratic deliberation on the state of bargaining and future industrial action.**

Management blocks Convocation on Gaza

By David Brophy

Opportunities for staff to have input into the direction of the University are few and far between. One avenue that exists—or should exist—is the institution of Convocation, a meeting of staff and alumni enshrined in the University's founding Act. The University is required to hold at least one meeting of Convocation annually, but it has ignored this requirement for decades. At its most recent meeting, the Senate deliberated on a request submitted by around 600 staff and alumni, for a Convocation to advise the University on its institutional ties with Israel, and the state of freedom of expression on campus. The University community overwhelmingly sympathises with the Palestinian cause. They have every right to have their say.

Disappointingly, the Senate rejected the request, ostensibly on the basis that Convocation is not “inclusive” enough. This is a poor excuse to deny members of Convocation their right to meet. When has the University ever shown interest in “inclusive” deliberation on its ties with the apartheid state of Israel? They also claimed that this Convocation

would preempt the outcome of the Royal Commission on Antisemitism, and ongoing TEQSA deliberations, as if these require us to hold our tongue on the daily horrors in Gaza and the West Bank.

Instead of fulfilling the obligation to hold Convocation, the Chancellor is now proposing to hold a one-off “community engagement town-hall.” It remains to be seen exactly what form this will take, but staff have good reason to be skeptical. We have had ample experience of closely choreographed “town-hall” meetings. Convocation has well-defined meeting procedures that allow for motions to be moved and voted. Will the University allow a meeting that it runs to debate and vote on a motion to cut ties with Israeli institutions? We will see.

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



Call out for next issue

Do you have a report from your workplace area at the University of Sydney? RAFA would love to hear from you. Write to rafauysyd@gmail.com, visit @rafausyd on Instagram, or call Matte on 0404654757

Industrial action: past, present, and future: a report on our 2nd of September strike

by Caitlin Erbacher

For the past six months, the NTEU has negotiated with University management in good faith in the hopes of producing an Enterprise Agreement that delivers enforceable protections for staff. However, four months into this process, the University's bargaining team remained intransigent on a number key issues including:

- Staff consultation rights during organisational change
- Protections for staff living with disabilities and chronic health conditions
- Job security and equal redundancy pay for professional staff
- Preservation of the research-teaching nexus and reduction of precarious employment among academic staff
- Artificial Intelligence provisions that ensure job security and staff agency

Understanding that the NTEU's bargaining power depends entirely upon the militancy and discipline of its members, we voted by a huge majority to take industrial action, applying pressure to management by withdrawing our labour for 24 hours.

On **Wednesday 2 September**, over 500 NTEU members attended picket lines, completely shutting down the Camperdown/Darlington campus, meanwhile hundreds more participated in the strike remotely.

Following this display of union power, substantial progress has been made in bargaining with regards to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets and cultural rights, provisions for staff with disabilities and chronic health conditions, and professional staff workloads.

However, negotiations have repeatedly been derailed by management's aggressive and dictatorial approach, including their decision to broadcast a “complete package” that disregarded in-principle agreements that had already been reached, and put forward a pay offer that, when adjusted for inflation, would see our wages remain below 2021 levels until at least 2030.

Following this, the NTEU voted to embark on an escalating campaign of industrial action, beginning with a 2-hour Stop Work meeting on Tuesday 13 October, followed by a full day strike on Thursday 22 October.

While the threat of industrial action has already facilitated incremental progress regarding limitations on the use of fixed-term employment, and agreement to negotiate a floor on 40/40/20 (but not agreement on the floor itself), considerable work remains to bring management into alignment with the NTEU's reasonable and necessary demands for enforceable AI protections, change management consultation, removing ambiguity from the freedom of speech clause, and a pay offer that addresses the cost of living crisis.

Going on strike and attending the picket lines on Thursday 22 October is the best way to show management that we mean what we say, that we are not afraid to fight for our rights, and that we will stand together in solidarity in the face of their efforts to divide and rule.



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rafausyd.com**

