

NTEU Fightback

Media Release

Rank-and-file groups call to Vote No in La Trobe pay cut ballot

3 June 2020 – NTEU Fightback and the La Trobe University NTEU rank-and-file group are calling on members to vote no in online union poll tomorrow on a variation to the Enterprise agreement which cuts wages substantially.

This comes as La Trobe Vice Chancellor has rowed back from claims made in the *Age* today.

Anthony O'Donnell, a Senior Lecturer in Law at La Trobe stated: "The presentations over the last 48 hours in public fora of La Trobe's finances initially presented them in an incredibly dire position. It was reported on the front page of the *Age* this morning that La Trobe could potentially go insolvent — in a way that must have been incredibly distressing to students, staff, campus support staff. By early afternoon today, the Vice Chancellor was saying that's not a possibility, and the premier was signalling some sort of a bailout.

Obviously the possibility of insolvency increases the likelihood of a yes vote to any variation in the EA because staff will vote from fear: it's the nuclear option. It would be good to have some greater transparency rather than this to-ing and fro-ing"

Clauses released by management show a significant cut in wages, the trashing of protections around major change and restructures, and no enforceable guarantees against the widespread attack on jobs that management at La Trobe has become known for in recent years.

A HEO4.3 worker on a current wage of around \$65,000 per year – the median full time female wage will lose \$174 per fortnight from July 1. The cut is \$290 per fortnight for academic staff A8, \$305 per fortnight for a professional HEO7.6. Figures provided in the NTEU's wage chart do not account for a suspension of the 1.6% pay rise due on 1 July (clause 20.3).

NTEU Fightback spokesperson and NTEU National Councillor Alma Torlakovic stated: "This is simply blackmail – agree to wage cuts or we will cut more jobs, says La Trobe management. It's a disgrace that our union is supporting this – unions are meant to defend their members pay and conditions, not cut them. What's worse – the union has no mandate for this at all. It withdrew the National Jobs Protection Framework as a national deal after an outcry from members across the country. And two large meetings of union members at La Trobe voted against approving any variation to the EA which involves concessions.

"Pay cuts do not save jobs. La Trobe management attacked staff in the good times, and now they're attacking them in the bad. Staff agreeing to this signals that workers are an easy target and we will pay for a crisis we didn't cause. Rejecting it instead ring-fences the enterprise agreement and tells management and state and federal government they must make up the shortfall from elsewhere.

"Universities are public institutions after all. It's a disgrace that Vice Chancellors swan

around on million dollar salaries, engage in vanity projects and spend millions on consultants and workers are meant to bear the pain. La Trobe management is saying that there will be hundreds of jobs cut anyway, and hundreds more if staff don't agree to a pay cut. There is nothing enforceable in the agreement that makes them put the money saved towards jobs. All of this means we need to be fighting job cuts on the ground, not doing deals with management hoping they'll be nicer to us.

"It's alarming that there are no enforceable wage schedules attached to the variation. The agreement allows for a maximum of 15% of an employee's salary to be cut, but devolves power to an unelected committee as to the amount of that cut.

"Another massive concern is that change management clauses are trashed. When management wants to carry out a restructure, at the moment this requires consultation and can take months. The means workers can campaign against job cuts. Now this will be rushed through there will be only five days for a committee to come up with a process for consultation before the matter is referred to fast track arbitration."

NTEU Fightback's detailed analysis available [here](#).

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