

## Why it is crucial to Vote No at La Trobe

Workers at La Trobe will vote in coming days on whether to approve a serious attack on wages and conditions. The clauses released by management (available [here](#)) 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.

Large branch meetings of NTEU members at La Trobe have voted (twice) against approving any variation to the EA which involves concessions. Yet the NTEU leadership is disregarding this, supporting a variation which contains significant attacks. By promoting a totally false story in the Age alleging that La Trobe was at risk of insolvency, and resorting to push-polling techniques, the union manufactured a majority in an electronic ballot in early June. But the fight is far from over. A [group of NTEU members](#) are active locally, and need all the help they can get on the ground - so please think about who you can forward this email to as part of the Vote No effort.

La Trobe is among the first universities in Australia to attack workers' wages and conditions in this way: a strong showing for Vote No will be an important demonstration of solidarity for workers in higher education and beyond resisting similar attacks from their employers.

### The attacks include:

#### 1. Wage cuts

**For example, for a HEO4.3 worker on a current wage of around \$65,000 per year the cut will be \$174 per fortnight from July 1.** The cut is \$290 per fortnight for academic staff A8, \$305 per fortnight for a professional HEO7.6.

This is a huge amount of money, especially for someone who earns close to the median full time female wage of \$65k. Management and the NTEU has finally provided their own figures, which show a cut of \$134 per fortnight for this worker, but they fail to take into account that management at La Trobe will also suspend the \$1.6% pay rise due on 1 July (clause 20.3).

Clause 19.2 allows a cut of up to "a maximum total of 15% of an employee's salary in any given pay period", made up of cuts to pay rates of ten percent on income above \$30,000 per year, plus the suspension of pay rises and increments. Staff can also be required to work in a higher classification, but without higher pay (15.1 and 15.2)

The pay tables which have finally been provided by management and the NTEU gives an idea of the cuts in pay (though excluding the effect of suspending EA pay rises), but it is not an enforceable part of the variation staff will vote on. For more detail on pay cuts at La Trobe see the detailed explainer on our website.

#### 2. No real guarantee on jobs

Management and the union are claiming that accepting pay cuts can save the jobs of 225 workers at La Trobe, but there is no language in the variation which enables this to be enforced. The variation schedule explicitly allows for redundancies where there is “the abolition of a substantial work function” (27.3.1) and “where there is a permanent insufficiency of work in a particular work unit” (27.5.2).

For casuals, there are meant to be protections for those with a “reasonable expectation” of continued employment (4.3), but this language has proved to be unenforceable on other campuses. Work can be taken from casuals if ongoing staff are short on hours (4.2).

### **3. Change management clauses are trashed**

La Trobe’s existing EA provides an extensive process that management are required to go through if they want to implement the sort of sweeping restructure that saw John Dewar abolishing 350 jobs in the “Future Ready” fiasco of 2014-15. These clauses are far from perfect, but they provide a significant window in which workers can campaign and seek to mitigate the change.

Under the La Trobe variation, these clauses are overridden by clause 25, which enable just five days for a committee to come up with a process for consultation before the matter is referred to fast track arbitration. The variation to our enterprise agreement is meant to be temporary, but the restructures that manage can fast track will not be.

### **4. How temporary are the changes?**

All the projections presented to staff in John Dewar’s briefing assumed that the changes would run from July 1 this year and for the whole of this year. This takes us into the next bargaining period (the current EA will expire on September 30 next year). As veterans of a decade of austerity in Greece following the 2009 crisis observed, “there is nothing as permanent as a temporary measure”.

### **5. Our vote will affect workers’ pay and conditions around the country**

La Trobe is one of the first universities to try to push through the significant attacks on wages and conditions opened up by the National Framework for cuts negotiated by Vice Chancellors and the national leadership of the NTEU. A big showing for Vote No is crucial to send a message to university administrations around the country that they can expect resistance if they proceed with these attacks.

### **6. There is an alternative**

Management can pursue other options such as loans at close to zero interest rates as a “bridge” over the problems caused by the pandemic. Workers don’t have those options.

We’ve had years of cutbacks, job insecurity, and increasing workloads – and now we’re being asked to let some of the richest institutions in the country raid the pay of our workmates to bail themselves out.

Giving these concessions without a fight just encourages the government to see cutting our wages as the easy option. We owe it to ourselves, and to workers around the country, to reject this blackmail and Vote No.

## **7. What happens next?**

On Tues 16 and Weds 17 June there's a ballot of all staff, which has legal force: if a majority of staff who vote approve the variation, our employment conditions will change.

There's more information on our website:

- Detail about the size of the wage cuts and methods of calculation
- A strategy for fighting back against job cuts that doesn't start with wage cuts
- More detailed information on management at La Trobe and their agenda in recent years – why should we believe them on job cuts now, given their record?
- How we can start to turn our union and our sector around, by Voting No and keeping on organising

**Please forward this information to colleagues who work at La Trobe.** If you're at La Trobe, consider organising a local area meeting where you and your colleagues can talk these issues through: contact us if you'd like a speaker for Vote No.

Management and the national leadership of the NTEU are working overtime to promote their awful concessionary deal: we need to work at least that hard if we're going to stand up for ourselves and our workmates, at La Trobe and beyond.

Alma, Katie and Liam for the NTEU Fightback team

Website - [www.nteufightback.site](http://www.nteufightback.site)

Email the campaign - [noconcessions.fight@gmail.com](mailto:noconcessions.fight@gmail.com)

Facebook organising page - [www.facebook.com/NTEUFightback](http://www.facebook.com/NTEUFightback)