

**"a new
NTEU"**



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A New NTEU

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The Jobs Protection Framework was symptomatic of a union leadership that has lost its way: it is time for university workers to choose a new direction, one that will increase our power, our numbers, and our ability to win the battles we face.

The years of 2020-2021 were a particularly difficult time for university workers, and it was a moment that our union, the National Tertiary Education Union, should have closed ranks with workers and confronted university management and the government to demand that our work be protected and our lives respected.

In a cruel irony our leadership, which included the current National President, Alison Barnes, and current Assistant Secretary, Gabe Gooding, who are both standing for re-election, and current NSW Division Secretary and candidate for National General Secretary, Damien Cahill, **agreed to trade away our pay and conditions (including up to 15% pay cuts and increased effective workloads) for vague and unenforceable guarantees that would “limit redundancies” and “save 12000 jobs”**. This scheme effectively gave union approval for vice chancellors to lay off staff, slash wages and increase workloads in an environment which resulted in 40 000 tertiary sector jobs lost.

Not only did they negotiate this deal without our knowledge or consent, **they took unprecedented anti-democratic measures to get it approved by the membership**, including preventing members from voicing their opposition in member and branch meetings, and seeking further votes despite the JPF being defeated at member meetings. In doing so they severely damaged the trust of the members in their union and its leaders, trust which has yet to be restored.

In response to the pandemic the NTEU saw a massive spike in membership as workers realized that a collective response was the only way to survive, but **the JPF debacle squandered this surge**, and membership density soon dropped back to its low, pre-Covid levels.

Despite all this, university workers fought back and defeated the JPF. **The anti-JPF position has since been strongly vindicated, with universities in Victoria and New South Wales recording over \$2 billion in surpluses collectively.** Universities were only momentarily financially disadvantaged during the pandemic and were poised to take advantage and make savage cuts, and our current union leadership was going to help them do it.

What would we have done instead?

Before all else the primary issue facing our union is the years of declining membership and member disengagement which have resulted in our present weak position. If our union was a strong, democratic and participatory union, with high density and a strong delegates system, then we would have had the strength to powerfully assert that university workers needed government support during the pandemic crisis. Despite all this, if we were at the helm of the NTEU in 2020 we would have:

- 1) Immediately and directly consulted the members to have an open and democratic discussion about the response we as workers wanted to make to the pandemic situation.
- 2) Asserted, correctly, that universities had the resources to absorb significant economic damage before passing it on to workers and that therefore we would not stand for cuts of any sort.
- 3) Ensured that the democratic processes of our union were respected and that the decision of the workers was final.
- 4) Embraced the explosion of grass-roots activity taking place all over the country that coalesced into groups such as the National Higher Education Action Network (NHEAN), the Casualized Unemployed and Precarious University Workers (CUPUW), and NTEU Fightback, and provided resources for such groups to do the on-the-ground organizing that was required to resist the attacks on our sector.

The NTEU has been stagnant for too long and it is costing us dearly. Many of our colleagues are exiting the sector, and those that remain are struggling to survive. It is time for us to take a powerful new direction led by rank and file workers who fundamentally understand the difficulties we all face. It is time for A New NTEU.



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To find out more about A New NTEU visit www.anewnteu.com, call 0451 614 751, or email anewnteu@gmail.com