



When employers gang up, we're ready2go

We have an unusual situation at six of our polytechnics (TAFEs) at present. We used to have a multi-employer collective agreement covering all six of the polytechnics but employers were using it to gang up and pressure union members to accept cuts in working conditions. Union members and their employers had been in a protracted series of negotiations, disputes and strikes - the eventual outcome of which was that most union members have had no real pay rise for three years apart from a \$700 lump sum payment, their collective agreement has been expired for more than a year, so they have all been moved onto individual agreements, and the employers are still trying to take away core working conditions.

Worst of all, because of the way our legislation works, the employers can appoint any new staff who join these polytechnics onto an inferior individual agreement with many core working conditions stripped out of it. They have no choice because there is no collective agreement to choose as an alternative.

Last year, and again earlier this year, our members at those six branches voted that they wanted to negotiate site-based collective agreements at each of their worksites rather than persist with trying to renegotiate the multi-employer collective agreement.

The six employers challenged this though, first before a full bench of the Employment Court and now, after losing that case, they have gone to the Court of Appeal. We expect the Court of Appeal's decision on 13 June. In the meantime, one of six the employers, Western Institute of Technology in Taranaki, broke away from the other five and settled a collective agreement with its TEU members in about five hours. That agreement includes a 4.5 per cent pay rise and no loss of conditions.

If the other five employers are a gang, the gang bosses are the chief executives a Unitec, in Auckland, and Wintec, in Hamilton. Those two institutions more than any other in the country give the very firm impression that they want to break the union on their campuses rather than negotiate a workable collective agreement.

Unitec's annual report, which came out recently, shows that the total amount it paid its academic staff last year fell \$160,000 from the previous year. The falling overall pay for academic staff is the result of an institution that will not negotiate properly with its staff but was wasting public money on legal challenges against its own staff. It is

simply unacceptable that Unitec would let the overall rate of pay for its academics slide downwards because of its own unwillingness to negotiate a Unitec collective agreement with its academic staff.

However, in the same period salaries and short-term employee benefits for key management personnel increased by nearly 3.5 per cent, and the new slimmed down Unitec council accepted average pay increases of more than 100 per cent.

Incredibly, the report counts the fall in academic salaries as an achieved target and notes the increase in general (allied) staff salaries represents an un-achieved target. It also reports that the student: staff ratio has climbed to 17.1:1 and that the academic staff turnover rate was 12.5 per cent, or one in 8 staff in 2010.

The 15 councillors in 2009 received a total of \$99,000 (an average of \$6,600 each). Some of those councillors were local staff, students and members of the community. The eight councillors in 2010, who were appointed by either the government or themselves, received \$116,000 (an average of \$14,500 each). The pattern is much the same for Wintec's councillors. They have chosen to accept substantial pay rises for themselves, while supporting a negotiating strategy that sees their own academic staff stripped of employment rights and denied reasonable pay rises.

TEU has launched a campaign in the five remaining polytechnics, Unitec and Wintec, as well as Northtec, in Whangarei, Bay of Plenty Polytechnic, and Whitireia in Porirua. Members at those five branches have called the campaign 'Ready2Go'. They are saying:

"We are sick of all the delays. We want a collective agreement at each of the five polytechnics. We have voted overwhelmingly in favour of this but our employers are trying to ignore the collective wishes of staff, and has been using public money to fight a legal appeal to try to avoid negotiating directly with us. We are ready - we have a team of professional, democratic, local people just like you. We know what we want - a fair pay rise and no loss of working conditions. We are getting moving on this for the good of our students, and for the good of education.

'We are ready to go...'

Sandra Grey is National President/Te Tumu Whakarae, New Zealand Tertiary Education Union/Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa

TEU www.teu.ac.nz

Send a message of support to the ready2go campaigners <http://teu.ac.nz/?p=14551>

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ready
2go** →

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information, b) proper investment in quality education, and c) for all academics to take note of the human beings in your classrooms, in all our complexity, and value what we bring to the table. That will take a coordinated effort from universities, government and all the people who inhabit our public institutions - that is, us. **A**

Tammi Jonas is a former

President of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA).

Tammi blogs at www.tammijonas.com, and twitters @tammois