Socialist Equality Party public meeting in Melbourne on July 20

The Australian Education Union, the Labor Party, and the political lessons of the Victorian teachers' struggle

3 July 2008

The *World Socialist Web Site* warmly invites all of our readers, as well as young people, workers, and especially teachers, to a public meeting being held in Melbourne by the Socialist Equality Party to discuss the political lessons of the recent industrial struggle of Victorian teachers.

Teachers won overwhelming support among working people in the course of their year-long campaign for higher wages, reduced class sizes, and the provision of permanent positions for contract teachers. The Australian Education Union (AEU) nevertheless negotiated a three-year agreement with the state Labor government of John Brumby that delivers a real wage cut for many teachers and which introduces a series of regressive measures that will further undermine the public education system.

The announcement of the proposed agreement was met with considerable anger and opposition and a lively discussion began to develop among teachers, including through emails and internet discussion forums. The AEU's response was to try and derail this development by sowing divisions within the membership's ranks. Delegates' meetings were convened, aimed at pushing through ratification with the minimum criticism or debate. Teachers were told they had no choice and that the union would fight for nothing more. In the end the agreement was accepted by a reported 85 percent following a secret ballot in public schools.

This outcome underscores the necessity for teachers, and the working class as a whole, to break out of the union straitjacket and begin to develop their own independent political perspective. The trade unions function as industrial policemen for the right-wing Labor administrations at both the federal and state level. The Rudd government has promised big business that the full cost of the deepening world economic crisis will be borne by working people, with wages to be suppressed and social spending slashed. Its so-called "education revolution" is really aimed at productivity gains—an agenda that dovetails with the Victorian government's education "Blueprint".

Opposition to the Rudd government's pro-market agenda is already emerging, but the critical question is that of political perspective. The Socialist Equality Party public meeting will provide a forum to discuss and debate these vital issues. It will advance an international socialist perspective, based upon the reorganisation of society to meet the social needs of the vast majority rather than the profit interests of the super-rich few.

Sunday, July 20, 2.00 p.m.
East Melbourne Library
122 George Street, East Melbourne
$3 entry

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