

Defeat Labor's pro-market "education revolution"!

For a national boycott of NAPLAN by teachers, parents and students!

28 August 2009

The Socialist Equality Party urges all teachers and parents to support the following resolution:

1) That this meeting at Rosehill Racecourse rejects the Rudd Labor government's NAPLAN test regime and school ranking system.

2) We call on teachers and parents to convene public meetings in every school district to open up a full democratic discussion on the Rudd government's education reforms. National school rankings are opposed by 95 percent of education professionals yet our voices are being silenced. This must end!

3) Rank and file committees of teachers and parents must be established in every school to organise the above information meetings and to plan a nation-wide boycott of Rudd's NAPLAN tests. This struggle will find powerful allies, not in parliament, but among hundreds of thousands of workers and their families across NSW, Australia and internationally.

Teachers, parents and students are facing the most far-reaching assault on public education in history. The Rudd Labor government's "education revolution" constitutes a seismic shift, with every aspect of education, from early-childhood through to adult education, being subject to the full blast of market competition.

There is a groundswell of opposition against these measures, but the teacher unions, including the NSW Teachers Federation, are working to bury it. At today's meeting they are calling on teachers to place their faith in a Greens parliamentary amendment that supposedly prevents newspapers in this state from publishing league tables.

The Greens amendment is a cynical diversion. The issue teachers confront is not simply the publication of

league tables by the *Daily Telegraph* and other newspapers. The Rudd government's entire NAPLAN test regime and national ranking system must be overturned.

Teachers and parents need to be clear: within the next few months Labor's Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) website will provide league tables under a different name nationwide. On the SBS "Insight" program last week, Gillard admitted that parents will be able to click on ACARA's website to compare schools in their local area based on NAPLAN test scores and other data. How is this different from league tables?

These measures have nothing to do with providing "transparency" and "choice" for "mums and dads". The only parents who will be able to exercise "choice" are those wealthy enough to move their children to private schools or to more affluent areas. Rudd's "education revolution" will entrench a two-class education system—one that mirrors the growing class divide in Australia between rich and poor.

Labor's ranking system will divide all schools into winners and losers. It will punish teachers and blame individual schools for problems created by decades of government under-funding and neglect. Within schools, performance pay will also create winners and losers, sowing divisions and destroying collegiality among teachers.

In the US where these policies have been implemented, the result has been a disaster. In New York City dozens of schools have been closed down, teachers and principals sacked, with a parallel growth of privately-run charter schools.

Rudd's "education revolution" is an education counter-revolution. Its central aim is to create

competition between schools—both public and private—and thereby an “education market place”. While the greatest economic and social disaster since the 1930s has erupted throughout the world, the Rudd government has determined that education will be subordinated to the very “market forces” responsible for it.

Even before the NAPLAN rankings have been published the curriculum is already narrowing. Teachers are being forced to teach to the test. The conception that education should develop the all-rounded physical, intellectual and creative capacities of young people is being completely jettisoned. In its place the Rudd government is advancing a model of education akin to assembly line production, with students treated as inputs and teachers stamping out standardised parts. Working class schools will bear the brunt.

Rudd’s measures—standardised testing, school rankings and performance pay—were first put on the table by the Howard government. When the Liberals failed to carry them out, Rudd accused them of dropping the ball on education “reform”. During the 2007 federal election he pledged to Murdoch and the financial elite that Labor would prosecute those free-market measures that the Liberals were unable to carry through. But the Labor government has no popular mandate for these policies!

If these measures are to be defeated, then teachers must strike out on a new political road, **in direct opposition** to Labor, Liberal, Greens and their pro-market program being enforced by the NSWTF.

The union is working hand-in-glove with Rudd and Gillard to enforce NAPLAN, to ram through their pro-market ranking system, and to impose performance pay. That is why they have invited Premier Nathan Rees, Minister for Education Verity Firth, Liberal education spokesman Adrian Picoli, and various Greens and Independents onto the platform at today’s meeting—the very politicians who are taking the axe, yet again, to public education and who are responsible for its current state.

For its part, the NSWTF has collaborated with every successive Labor and Liberal government over the past two and a half decades. The outcome of its complicity has been the gutting of public education. If teachers remain under its domination then this struggle will be

defeated.

Every school deserves the highest quality infrastructure and facilities, and the social resources already exist to provide them. But as long as economic and social life is subordinated to the drive for private profit, they will be available only to the privileged few. Only on the basis of an entirely new strategy—a socialist strategy, based on the independent political mobilisation of the working class as a whole—can genuine educational and social equality be realised. A socialist movement would nationalise and place under the democratic control of the working class the productive capacity of mankind, creating the conditions where every student has the right to a decent, well-resourced, well-rounded education at every level.

The Socialist Equality Party urges all teachers and parents at today’s meeting to support the above resolution, thereby opening up an independent political struggle against the Rudd Labor government’s pro-market agenda.

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