

Victorian TAFE teachers speak on cuts to funding

Our reporters

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World Socialist Web Site reporters and Socialist Equality Party supporters spoke with teachers and students at the state-wide technical and further education (TAFE) stop-work rally on Thursday called by the Australian Education Union and National Tertiary Education Union. (See: “TAFE teachers strike over job losses, assets sell off”)

The team distributed a leaflet titled, “Australia: teachers face political struggle to fight Victorian TAFE cuts.” It warned: “It is increasingly clear ... that the Labor Party and the trade unions are intent on diverting the anger over these devastating cuts into the dead end of a campaign for the return of a Labor state government—in two years’ time—that will only deepen the assault on TAFE and public education as a whole.” SEP campaigners also invited workers to attend the party’s upcoming public meeting to discuss the way forward against the deepening austerity spending cuts by the federal Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

TAFE staff expressed their hostility to the cuts and their disgust with both major political parties, Labor and Liberal. Despite the fact that none of the speakers at the rally referred once to the Gillard government, a number of workers noted that Gillard’s education policy was behind the growing privatisation of education. Many expressed their opposition to the invitation by the organisers to Daniel Andrews, the state Labor opposition leader, to address the rally.

Wayne, a TAFE teacher from the North Melbourne Institute of Technology (NMIT), was among those who heckled Andrews during his speech, shouting out, “Your party started this!” He later explained: “The

template of TAFE cuts was developed by the [former Labor premier John] Brumby government when they allowed the unfettered explosion of private providers. Brumby and [Labor education minister] Jacinta Allen provided the gun and the loaded magazine. All [Liberal Premier Ted] Baillieu did was pull the trigger.”

Asked about the role of the federal Labor government, Wayne said: “This all came from Gillard. She has been pushing this with her ‘education revolution’ policy, which is all designed to privatise education. The Labor opposition and Baillieu government are equally culpable for the disaster.”

Allan and **Dean** teach in the building construction area at NMIT. “This goes right back to Brumby and before him [former Liberal premier] Jeff Kennett,” Allan said. “I’ve been teaching for eleven years, and they’ve continually cut spending and opened up the sector to private providers. It makes it difficult to provide training. We’ve been forced to use less materials in the course.”

Dean said that he was not sure whether there would be job losses at his TAFE institute: “We’re waiting on the school to release its ‘transition’ policies. Until then it’s all up in the air. No one knows who’s going to lose their job, or whether there will be course closures.”

Allan added: “A teacher came to our work from England last month and said the system here is going the same way as what’s happened there.” Asked what he thought about the Gillard government’s education policies, Allan said: “She’s an unelected prime minister. I didn’t vote for her.” Dean added: “I don’t trust any of them—Labor or Liberal.”

Shaun, a disability services manager at a regional TAFE institute, described the effect of the cuts on extra-curricular services for students.

“We’ve already had job losses in youth workers and careers councillors,” he explained. “Disability units are losing officers, libraries are closing as we speak—there is a library shutting down today. We’re not getting a lot of details. I’m worried that people think that because disability services are required by law and we have to provide them, that they’re funded separately. They’re not.

“We have zero funding from the government next year for all support services across Victoria. This affects equipment for students with disability, interpreters for deaf students, support for visually impaired students, in-class integration aids for students with autism and Asperger Syndrome counsellors, welfare advisers—it’s all gone.”

He continued: “It’s going to have a flow-on effect across the community. If the free, in-house services are gone, it’s going to put more pressure on our already stretched-to-breaking-point mental health services, particularly in regional areas. If you can’t get to see a free counsellor at TAFE, when you need it, what will you do? This will cost people’s lives. We’re talking about the most endangered members of the community.”

Shaun also stated: “We had a feeling that this was staged over time and began under the Labor government. It has accelerated under this government. I do not see any difference between the Labor and Liberal parties.”

Tom and **Robert** teach in the hospitality area at the William Angliss institute in inner-city Melbourne. They have both been teaching for 20 years.

Asked how the cuts had affected him, Robert said: “We’ve been brutalised. They’ve cut funding to \$1.50 per hour per student for hospitality courses. I’ve already lost four mates this year. Out of 70 staff, 20 people have been sacked so far. They’ve just announced another restructuring this week, and I expect they’ll also be dumping courses.”

He added: “Labor opened up TAFE to private

providers. The impact of that was felt immediately. Students would go to the private providers for cheaper courses, but they would be taught practically nothing.”

Tom agreed, stating: “Labor fully supported all this. Jacinta Allan came to our TAFE and tried to tell us that black was white, saying the best way to improve education was to give more money to these private providers ... Daniel Andrews gave an interview about a month ago and was asked whether he would reverse the cuts if he was in power. And he basically replied, ‘we’ll have to look at the budget.’ So in other words they all agree.”

Asked about the role of the federal Labor government, Tom replied: “Gillard’s ‘education revolution’ is in line with this. She’s tying federal funding to the state governments so that they can cut funding when the states do. What a joke it is. They’re all laughing at us, the state and federal governments. They blame each other in public for what’s happening but they’re both doing it. The hidden agenda is privatisation, and that’s supported by both parties.”



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