

# Teachers oppose Australian Education Union sell-out deal at Victorian delegates meeting

**Our reporters**  
**3 May 2017**

The Australian Education Union (AEU) in Victoria has commenced anti-democratically convened delegates' meetings, aimed at ramming through its sell-out deal with the state Labour government on a new four-year salaries and conditions agreement for public school teachers.

The deal was announced last month by AEU President Meredith Peace, via the media, after 12 months of closed-door negotiations with the Andrews government. Peace claimed that it represented a "significant gain" that addressed "crushing workloads," and "insecure employment" for thousands of contract teachers and Education Support (ES) staff.

Contrary to the AEU's claims, the deal amounts to a wage freeze, ever-closer monitoring of teacher performance, no reduction in teacher workloads and a sweeping commitment to ongoing educational "reform."

The union intended to push through the deal with little or no discussion. Union branches had hardly any time to organise branch meetings, discuss the document and elect delegates to attend state-wide delegates' meetings. Moreover, as soon as the deal was made public, the AEU began deleting any critical posts from its Facebook page, including those influenced by the analysis presented on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The first ratification meeting was held on Monday evening at AEU headquarters in Abbotsford, beginning two weeks of delegates' meetings across the Melbourne metropolitan area and in regional and country centres.

During the course of the two and a half hour meeting, teacher numbers dwindled, as many delegates simply deposited their vote in the ballot box and left. Those who remained—around 60–70—represented a determined and vocal opposition, with many younger teachers speaking out against the deal. Over previous days, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) had established a Facebook page "Teachers and ES against the Victorian Education Agreement" with information and analyses about the

agreement that had been suppressed by the AEU, along with numerous teacher comments.

Teacher members and supporters of the SEP established the basis for a genuinely democratic discussion by moving a procedural motion at the start of the meeting that called for limiting the main report to 15 minutes in order to allow at least an hour of open discussion, enabling those both "for" and "against" to speak.

SEP member, Frank Gaglioti, seconded the resolution, pointing to the political agenda behind the agreement. "The AEU's flagrant disregard of democratic norms reflects the fact that they are trying to push through a deal that is aimed at destroying teachers' working conditions and rights." The deal, Gaglioti continued, was "designed to deepen the government's agenda of using standardised testing" in order to intensify its drive to "privatise public education."

While several other teachers spoke in favour, citing, as evidence of the union's suppression of their democratic rights, the lack of time for local branches to meet and discuss the agreement, the resolution was narrowly defeated. The vote revealed, nevertheless, mounting opposition among teachers, both to the union's bureaucratic methods and to the agreement itself.

Another SEP member and secondary teacher, Will Marshall, then moved a suspension of standing orders, calling for a state-wide stoppage and mass meetings, in which all teachers could be involved in discussing the agreement, whether for or against. Union chairperson, Briley Duncan, Vice President of the primary division, immediately ruled it out of order, declaring it was "against the rules of the AEU adopted by the State Council."

Marshall dissented from the ruling. This was "the first time in the process of agreements that there have been no mass meetings called, with no discussion," he said. "How is it that the State Council can set such a precedent?" He

emphasised that teachers had “the right to disagree with the council,” along with the right to discussion, and to hear the views of all those who wanted to speak, “not just the delegates.”

Duncan replied that mass meetings “have never been part of the ratification process,” attacking Marshall for “trying to overrule our elected delegates ... outside AEU rules.” The dissent vote was lost.

The controversy, however, encouraged other teachers to speak and the union was forced to allow SEP members to address the meeting on several occasions. Those present listened intently, without interjection, and, on several occasions, applauded.

Deputy President Justin Mullaly made a Power Point presentation of the deal, peppered with misleading summaries and an absence of key details. Following his report, many delegates rose to their feet, questioning and commenting on his fraudulent claims, especially in relation to workload and contracts.

SEP member Sue Phillips, a teacher of 30 years’ standing, asked how the AEU could expect teachers to endorse what was described in the union’s official resolution as “the associated package of improvements,” when teachers had no idea what this “package” involved. There had been no details or explanation provide.

Phillips went on to make clear that, in fact, the “package of improvements” referred to the recommendations of the Bracks review, which included further attacks on teachers’ working conditions, accelerated school amalgamations, and intensified teacher surveillance tied to performance. She called for a “no” vote.

Marshall and Gaglioti exposed specific aspects of the agreement and the Bracks review, which advocated continuing teacher performance reviews, and the linking of teacher performance to “salary progression.” Under the deal, they emphasised, if standardised test data revealed declining student test results, then “principals will be forced to fail teachers’ performance reviews with loss of salary increments and possible removal.”

Gaglioti described the four “Professional” days for teachers, included in the deal, as a complete sham that would do nothing to decrease workloads. He pointed out that the agreement stipulated that these days would be “consistent with department and school priorities,” in other words, “doing your review, focusing on collecting and analysing data, writing pre-tests and post-tests, and further narrowing the curriculum.”

He continued, “The AEU document reads like a government tract designed to privatise the public-school

system. The way they are doing this is through judging our performance, based on data obtained from the NAPLAN and VCE grades. Birmingham [federal Education Minister] has flagged massive cuts to education and the AEU will do what is necessary to ensure they go through.”

“This is in line with the privatisation agenda being implemented in the US and Great Britain. In the US under Obama, over 300,000 education workers were sacked and Trump’s Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, has the perspective of turning all public schools into “for-profit” charters schools. In Britain, a similar process is underway,” Gaglioti pointed out.

A teacher and long-time member of the pseudo-left Socialist Alternative provided the organisation’s ritual political cover for the union betrayal, referring to the agreement as “not quite as bad as the ones we’ve had to put up with in the past... under pressure the government did offer some concessions.”

In the course of the lengthy meeting, only union officials and two other speakers spoke in favour of the agreement. For the many who spoke against, what dominated was growing suspicion of the union and pent up opposition, particularly among younger teachers, over deteriorating wages, working conditions and the ongoing assault on public education.

The final ballot paper vote was 52 opposed and 95 in favour—expressing the development of a growing rebellion by teachers against the union-Labor government deal. Further delegates meetings will be held over the next two weeks, with the union doing everything it possibly can to stifle opposition and prevent a majority “no” vote.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**