# Australia: Victorian teachers speak out against agreement after union delegate meeting

**Our reporters**
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The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to teachers on Monday night at the first of the Australian Education Union delegate meetings, where the union is seeking to ram through its sell-out agreement with the Victorian state Labor government.

**Finn**, a music teacher at Thornbury Secondary College, attended a delegate meeting on Monday evening in Abbottsford, along with two of his colleagues, and was one of many teachers who spoke against the agreement during the meeting.

Teacher members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party won considerable support from other teachers when they exposed the reactionary character of the agreement and the union's complicity in the drive, by successive state and federal governments, to dismantle the public education system through the promotion of performance pay and standardised testing. (See: "Teachers oppose Australian Education Union sell-out deal at Victorian delegates meeting")

Commenting on the inclusion in the deal of four extra "Professional Practice" days for teachers, Finn said, "The union says the deal addresses workload. It doesn't. As far as the four Professional Practice days they have offered a year, to supposedly address workload, we think that this might create more work for us. It doesn't address class sizes and the number of meetings [we have to attend after school hours]. Some teachers like me, who have worked for 8 to 10 years, are thinking about leaving the profession. Some are thinking, what to do next?"

"In our particular department," he continued, "we run a curriculum that only four state schools run, a free music education for Year-7s, [providing] all instruments. Our new principal really supports that. But how long can we keep up this situation in regards to workload. We're all performing arts teachers; we're already doing the concerts, already doing rehearsals, all of that stuff."

Finn criticised the fact that the union had organised a mass advertising campaign calling for teachers to vote "yes" to the agreement, including with leaflets outside the delegate meeting venue. "We are paying members. Membership is not cheap in this organisation. I don't need to be persuaded. I can read and I can debate that myself. I was really annoyed; the union flyer must have cost thousands of dollars." He added: "I said on the way here—no way are they going to actually have people handing out leaflets."

Finn added: "Our school is highly unionised—94 percent union members—and a lot of older members are saying, why am I paying? Our branch voted unanimously 'no' against the agreement."

"I have concerns about what is happening in education—over the public versus private," he said. "If you make education a commodity and your parents and students as stakeholders, then you are going to start to put Thornbury High up against Northcote Secondary. We'll start to say 'We have this music program, come to us and not them.' In essence, the public-school system's meant to suit the public around its community, whatever that might be. It's not supposed to be advertising to get more numbers. Unfortunately, when you've got public versus private, and money is driving everything, they're going to promote 'go here, don't go here.'

"If you don't have the money, public education can't continue. If you continue to sell education, that's a huge problem of ours. I'm quite fearful of that."

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Finn commented that prior to the delegates' meeting he was not aware that teachers were being forced to vote on a "package of improvement" side-agreement, of which the overwhelming majority of teachers have no knowledge. The issue was raised in the Abbotsford meeting by SEP members, who explained that the side-deal referred to recommendations in the Bracks review, which calls not only for teachers' pay increases to be tied to performance, but for accelerated school amalgamations and other attacks on working conditions. (See: "The Victorian teachers agreement and 'performance pay'—What the Australian Education Union is suppressing")

"That's certainly something that I will check out," Finn said. "I've been teaching for eight years now, so NAPLAN [a standardised testing system established by the former Labor government in 2009] had just come in, and I was just hanging on to get a job, doing as much as I could getting a job. Reflecting upon it now, there does seem to be a huge push in regards to data, and linking that. Obviously, a school like ours, which is completely diverse—you could have class 7C and 7E, [where] the data is going to be completely different. Irrespective of what your teaching abilities are, it's not going to truly reflect, and it can't reflect, the real situation. 7C could have 8 children with disabilities, 7E won't. This happens across the board."

"If that is the agenda, I would be very fearful of continuing," he concluded. "The person appeasing the principal will get the best class. It opens the floodgates for all that workplace bullying, for that person to be removed, where they say, let's give them 7E next year, and we'll be able to move that agenda. For me, it's quite fearful. I'm sure that happens at all schools, across the board."

**Peter**, a teacher at an inner-suburban school, attended the same delegates meeting. "There hasn't been any honesty about where their [the AEU's] ideas have come from," he said. "I think we should be wary, particularly given the direction of the US and Britain." Peter raised his concern that, while not acknowledging it, the agreement was supporting precisely that direction.

"The ratification meeting occurred one day prior to the state budget," he commented. "I haven't seen anything in the budget about a large sum of $300 million, which is what the union said would cover the CRT [casual relief teachers] costs [for an additional four Professional Practice days per year]. Either the government is being silent about this or the union is being disingenuous. Schools will be given a lump sum. This will mean that schools, in order to have more funds, will be keen for teachers to have those professional development days when they have a smaller amount of classes, meaning that less coverage is required. Teachers won't have choice over this."

**Jane**, a teacher at another inner-suburban school in Melbourne, spoke to WSWS reporters on her way into the meeting. "I don't think the union has given us expressly what's contained within this agreement," she said. "In terms of our workload, apart from getting a day off a term, that's the only concrete thing that I can see we're getting."

**Rebecca**, referrred to the so-called '30 plus 8' rule in the agreement: "What they're doing is putting the onus on teachers to change the culture in the workplaces. They're coming up with this '30 plus 8' rule, where you do 30 hours of face-to-face teaching and eight hours of admin, and when you get to the end of your eight hours, no matter what more work you've got to do, you are supposed to stop and say to your principal, 'I'm finished now, I've done my 8 hours.' It's just ludicrous. There's nothing in the agreement apart from the one day a term that's of any benefit."

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