

Teachers condemn union's sell-out agreement in New South Wales

Our reporter
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The New South Wales Teachers Federation (NSWTF) pushed through a new two-year Salaries and Conditions award at anti-democratic stop work meetings held across the state on December 5. The agreement sets the conditions for 60,000 public school teachers from 2020 to 2022. While claiming “overwhelming” endorsement of the deal with the NSW government, the union has not published the breakdown of votes for, against or abstaining, nor the details of any amendments passed at the meetings.

The meetings were held in some 200 venues, including hotels and cinemas, lasting less than an hour. A 30 minute “live broadcast” was presented by union officials, followed by a vote. This was despite the fact that teachers will not be able to read the contents of the deal for up to two months.

The NSWTF was so determined to rush through a “yes” vote that meeting convenors required a show of hands before time was allowed for questions and debate. Question time was limited to five minutes, with only one question per person allowed. Speakers opposed to the agreement were given just three minutes to speak, and time for debate was shut down after 15 minutes.

One teacher told the WSW: “At the meeting I attended there was a sense of urgency created which meant very little discussion or questions took place.” Another teacher posted on Facebook: “I felt humiliated and belittled when I asked a question.” One wrote: “My whole feeling was the deal is done! Our say means nothing!” Another asked: “Why were details of the new agreement in negotiation not available to members BEFORE today’s meeting? This is wrong.”

In a direct assault on freedom of speech, a teacher who attempted to circulate the Committee For Public Education’s December 3 statement, calling for a “no”

vote at a meeting venue in the working class city of Wollongong, south of Sydney, was ordered by a union organiser to stop handing it out, on the grounds that it had not been “authorised” by the NSWTF.

During the half hour broadcast, and in subsequent communication with teachers, the union claimed the salaries agreement had produced “significant gains.”

Speaking at the broadcast, Maurie Mulheron, current NSWTF president, touted the placement of a number of education officers, including Home School Liaison Officers, onto a “standards” based pay scale. The vast majority of NSW public school teachers were moved onto this in 2016. The “standards” based scale has now replaced the long established method of payment according to years of service. This transition has tied pay rises to the acquisition of “standards,” a measure opposed by the Committee For Public Education (CFPE) as a veiled step towards the divisive and universally opposed method of payment according to students’ results.

Mulheron also claimed that a pay anomaly that emerged in 2012–2015, as part of the transition, had been resolved. Up to 5,000 mostly young teachers have been affected by this anomaly, which has cost them between \$30,000 and \$50,000 in remuneration, with no possibility of back pay.

In the days following the broadcast, teachers voiced their disgust with the union on the 2012–2015 NSW Teachers Facebook page.

One commented: “This ‘resolution’ makes absolutely no difference to me whatsoever. I am beyond angry about this.” Another wrote: “I literally break even with the old pay scale... the worst thing about this is that the union was deceitful in its approach.” Another comment read: “I am bewildered, frustrated, upset and downright furious by this so-called

union whose motto is ‘Strength In Unity.’ I feel betrayed.”

In addition to keeping members in the dark about the full content of the agreement, the union consciously set out to divide those younger teachers affected by the pay anomaly from longer-serving teachers. A teacher told the WSWS: “The Federation implied that if the agreement was not accepted, then not only would there not be a raise in January and in 2021, but it was highly likely that already achieved conditions would be lost also.”

Despite the union’s tactics, however, there was wide scale opposition to the “settlement” of the pay anomaly. As a teacher reported on Facebook: “At the meeting I attended we had someone stand up and say they would like to strike from the record the word ‘resolution,’ as it hasn’t been resolved. It was agreed to by over 200 people.”

The union’s claim to have resolved the pay anomaly has already been exposed as another fraud. A statement announced by federal and state education ministers, a few days after the stop work meetings, has blown apart the union’s claim to have preserved teachers’ working conditions. On December 9, education ministers announced the fast-track roll-out of the Gonski 2.0 “learning progressions,” involving an even more intensive government testing and assessment regime of student, teacher and principal “performance” than currently imposed under the NAPLAN scheme. The impact will be an exponential increase in teacher workloads.

The NSWTF’s record on supporting and enforcing the toxic effects of standardised testing is clear. The union’s reward for engaging in “extensive consultations” with state government education bodies on beefed up testing programs, including *Bump It Up* and *Stronger HSC Standards*, was a “core” seat on the six-member NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA).

As for the NSWTF’s claim that the agreement includes “real growth in salaries,” 2.5 per cent in 2020 and 2.28 in 2021 will do nothing to offset cost-of-living increases, with the expected 30 percent hike in energy costs and ever-increasing house prices.

In the meeting at Castle Hill in Sydney, Erika Laslett, long-standing teacher and CFPE member, called for a no vote on the agreement and urged teachers to begin to

organise independent rank-and-file committees, made up of the most self-sacrificing and trusted teachers in all schools.

Laslett told the meeting: “Teachers’ demands around the world are the same: for genuine wages, lower class sizes and a curriculum geared to the needs of children, not edu-businesses. Despite the willingness of teachers to fight, the unions attempt at every point to isolate and strangle their actions.”

“The NSWTF, like all unions, is a political instrument of big business. Teachers require new organisations of struggle, democratically controlled by rank-and-file educators themselves to fight for what teachers, support staff and their children need. It is only through such bodies, independent of, and in political opposition to, the agenda of the unions, that teachers’ voices will be heard.

“Such committees should aim to unite teachers throughout the state, nationally and internationally, to end the subordination of education and all social needs to the profit interests of the banks and major corporations.”

We urge all teachers who agree with this perspective to become actively involved in the CFPE.



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