

Australia: Vote “no” to the teachers’ sell-out agreement in Victoria! Prepare for a political struggle against state Labor government!

Committee For Public Education
25 April 2022

The Committee For Public Education (CFPE) calls on teachers and education support staff in the state of Victoria to vote “no” in the ballot for the regressive industrial agreement concocted by the Australian Education Union (AEU) and state Labor government. The ballot date, yet to be announced, is due to take place after teachers return to schools on April 26.

The agreement represented a substantial cut in real wages at the time it was struck. Now, however, with prices rising dramatically and high inflation becoming entrenched, not only in Australia but internationally, deep inroads will be made into teachers’ incomes over the next three years. If the agreement is passed, onerous workloads, large class sizes, lack of staff and deteriorating school conditions will continue with COVID surging through schools.

AEU members should reject with contempt the anti-democratic demand from the union apparatus to vote “yes” because a majority of delegates at ratification meetings voted in favour. It ignores that fact that an unprecedented 40 percent voted against, despite every effort by the union to censor and stifle debate in its efforts to ram through the sell-out deal.

A “no” vote would be a blow against the efforts of the Labor government of Premier Daniel Andrews to suppress real wages and maintain intolerable conditions not only for teachers, but across the public sector.

However, we warn in advance that the AEU will react to a “no” vote with closed door talks with the government and a “new” agreement virtually the same as the old. Other unions have used this method to wear down and exhaust opposition and finally get a “yes” vote.

Teachers need to take matters into their own hands. The fight for decent wages, workloads and properly funded public education means a determined political and industrial fight against the Andrews government.

Australia is mired in the global crisis of capitalism. The economic dislocation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is

now being compounded by the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. Inflation is skyrocketing in the US and Britain as well as oppressed countries like Sri Lanka and Peru, fuelling strikes and protest movements.

Here, Victoria is the most heavily indebted state and has the largest deficit. State debt is set to rise to a record \$200 billion, representing nearly one-third of total state gross product, while the operating deficit for the current financial year is predicted to be \$19.5 billion.

Much of this debt piled up as a result of the pandemic as economic activity shrank during lockdowns and the government handed out billions of dollars to big business. Credit rating agencies stripped Victoria of its AAA credit rating in late 2020, worsening its economic position.

In response to the demands of the corporate elite, Andrews, in league with the New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet and Prime Minister Scott Morrison, has ditched virtually all public health measures. Since December, infections, hospitalisations and deaths have skyrocketed. Schools have been transformed into super-spreading sites.

Governments that are prepared to sacrifice the health and lives of working people to corporate profits will not hesitate to impose harsh new burdens on teachers and other sections of the working class. Nothing less than a rebellion is required against the program of austerity being imposed on workers, aided and abetted in every case by the trade unions.

Victorian teachers cannot take a step forward without breaking out of the straitjacket of the AEU, which has imposed one sell-out agreement after another. The affluent AEU apparatus is in bed with the Andrews government and hostile to the interests of teachers. Since Andrews came to power, the AEU has blocked all industrial action—even the limited stoppages of the past.

It is not a question of changing the bureaucrats in charge of the union, but of establishing new fighting organisations.

The CFPE urges teachers to set up democratically-elected rank-and-file committees in every school, independent of the union, to fight for their interests and to link up in a broader political struggle against the Andrews government and its AEU lackeys.

Teachers have powerful allies in this fight. Educators in other states and internationally have already been engaged in similar struggles as are other sections of the working class. Teachers in New South Wales (NSW) took their first strike action in a decade last December and are still without a new industrial agreement. In South Australia, teachers voted overwhelmingly in January for industrial action which was sabotaged by the AEU.

The CFPE fights for the closest unity of educators and the whole working class. We warn that any determined struggle will confront the barrage of anti-strike laws at the state and federal level. In February and again last month, nurses in NSW defied a government-court ban on their strike action. A call for the repeal of all anti-strike laws needs to be inscribed on the banner of all workers.

The CFPE proposes the following demands as the basis for a fight by rank-and-file committees:

- An immediate across-the-board pay increase to compensate for previous inadequate wage deals. Salaries fully indexed against inflation, with automatic monthly cost of living adjustments to ensure no educator is worse off in the future.

- Hire thousands of teachers and education support staff to end the current huge workloads. Maximum class sizes of 18-20. End the burden of administrative tasks, so that teachers can focus on teaching. Adequate time within school hours for planning, assessment and collaboration with colleagues.

- Transfer all teachers and support staff on temporary contracts to permanent positions. Excess teachers to be given priority. Re-employ the large number of experienced educators driven out of the profession due to excessive workload and the imposition of regressive pedagogical methods, including NAPLAN.

- Implement the necessary public health care measures to combat COVID-19 in the schools, including mask wearing, social distancing and ventilation. End the cover-up of infections—teachers, students, and parents have the right to know about infections and clusters. Shift to properly-resourced remote learning while community infections are taking place. Teachers and school workers infected or forced to self-isolate must receive full income support, with no loss of accrued leave entitlements.

- Fully-funded, properly staffed, and high-quality support services for all students, including those with disabilities and those affected by the pandemic.

- Halt the privatisation of Australia's school system! No more public funds for elite private schools! Pour tens of billions of dollars into public education to reverse decades of under-funding and provide free, high-quality education to every child.

The CFPE rejects the claims of governments, unions, the media and all those who defend capitalism that there is “no money.” There are resources, which are all produced by the working class, but they are in the hands of the corporate and financial elite. We call for the nationalisation of the banks, mining companies and major corporations under democratic workers' control so as to meet the pressing social needs of the majority, not the profits of the wealthy few.

The Socialist Equality Party, which initiated the CFPE, fights for a socialist and internationalist perspective to unify the working class in political struggle for a workers' government to refashion society along socialist lines. We urge teachers to support the SEP and its candidates in the current federal election (see: “A socialist program of action for the working class to oppose war and fight COVID-19 and austerity”).

The SEP and CFPE offer every assistance to teachers to establish rank-and-file committees and to take forward this political struggle. We encourage you to contact us and distribute our articles, statements, and posters in your school and other schools. We are willing to speak at meetings you convene in schools. Above all, we urge you to join the ranks of the CFPE and the SEP.

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook:

facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout/

Twitter: @CFPE_Australia

Authorised by Cheryl Crisp for the Socialist Equality Party, Suite 906, 185 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact