

Attend CFPE (Australia) meeting: “The crisis of public education, the betrayal of the teacher unions, and the need for independent rank-and-file committees”

Committee for Public Education
9 June 2022

The Committee for Public Education (CFPE) invites educators, students and working people in Australia and internationally to participate in an online meeting on Sunday, June 19, at 1 p.m. (AEDT).

The event, titled “The crisis of public education, the betrayal of the teacher unions, and the need for independent rank-and-file committees,” will review the disaster that has developed in public schools and the responsibility the Australian Education Union bears for it. The discussion will also outline a political perspective, including the building of rank-and-file committees, to fight for decent wages and conditions for educators and for a properly resourced, universally accessible public education system. Register now: <https://bit.ly/3Q2MEBi>

Public school teachers and Education Support staff have recently passed through several important experiences with the teacher unions.

In Victoria, the Australian Education Union (AEU) last month only narrowly managed to ram through a regressive four-year industrial agreement. The deal struck between the union and the state Labor government involved a nominal annual wage rise of less than 2 percent, representing a substantial real wage cut. Union officials secured a majority vote in favour of the agreement by mounting a determined campaign of misinformation and social media censorship. Despite this, record opposition was registered in union delegates’ meetings and the final general ballot, with 38-39 percent voting “no.” This opposition, which will only intensify as the cost of living crisis escalates further in the next period, provides an important basis

for building a political movement in defence of educators’ wages and conditions and for the public education system.

This movement has to be developed nationally and internationally. The Victorian school real wage cut will be used by the recently elected federal Labor government as a precedent. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his colleagues are determined to make the working class bear the burden of its drive to slash escalating debts and deficits through austerity measures.

The Victorian AEU sellout follows a similar process in South Australia two years ago, when an industrial agreement that involved real wage cuts and the maintenance of existing poor conditions was only narrowly ratified by 54 percent, with 46 percent of educators voting against.

Now in New South Wales, public school workers confront the threat of yet another union industrial agreement betrayal. This has been clearly foreshadowed by the NSW Teachers Federation’s decision to issue the state Liberal government of Premier Dominic Perrottet with a no strike pledge. This followed two 24-hour strikes, in May and December, the first such industrial actions in NSW for a decade. These limited actions were twice followed by no strike pledges, based on craven “good faith” appeals to the right-wing Perrottet government. In ruling out further industrial action, the NSW Teachers Federation bureaucracy was consciously isolating teachers, including from their Catholic sector colleagues who also recently took strike action, and blocking a united

struggle of other public sector workers confronting similar attacks, including public servants, nurses and health workers, and railway workers.

The teacher unions' collaboration with state government attacks on the public education system and on teachers' wages and conditions is consistent with their critical role in enforcing the reopening of the schools at the beginning of the year, despite surging COVID-19 infections. The entire political establishment, Labor and Liberal alike, worked to sabotage Australia's zero-COVID situation towards the end of 2021, heeding the demands of big business and finance capital for the junking of all public health measures that impinged on profits. Then Prime Minister Scott Morrison openly explained that the schools had to be reopened, regardless of infection rates, so that businesses could force workers back into their workplaces. The teacher unions heeded the call, preventing any opposition from emerging as schools became super spreading sites, threatening hundreds of thousands of children and school workers with Long COVID and other adverse health effects.

The CFPE's public meeting will analyse these developments and explain the basis for our call for the formation of rank-and-file committees. Not a single step forward can be taken within the confines of the teacher unions. Comprising a highly paid, upper-middle class layer, the union bureaucracy's lucrative privileges derive from its collaboration with federal and state governments, against the interests of ordinary teachers and school workers. It is necessary to build a network of rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade unions, democratically organised and led by trusted educators and school workers, to take forward the necessary political and industrial struggle for the public education system.

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. This means a fight for a socialist perspective.

The CFPE's public meeting will provide a forum in

which uncensored discussion, questions, and experiences from different schools and communities can be raised. The meeting will also feature a speaker from the United States, who will report on the crisis of public education there and the important industrial action recently taken by educators in different states to defend their interests and those of their students.

Register in advance and promote the meeting among educators, students, colleagues and friends!

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout/

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