

CFPE delegates to intervene in Australian teacher union conference

Committee For Public Education
2 May 2023

Several members of the Committee For Public Education (CFPE), the educators' rank-and-file network, have successfully nominated as delegates to the Australian Education Union's (AEU) Victorian state conference, to be held in July, in order to take forward the fight to expose and oppose the AEU bureaucrats.

The union leadership has been responsible for helping capitalist governments impose dire conditions in public schools. CFPE delegates will fight for a counter-offensive, putting power and democratic control in the hands of educators through the formation of rank-and-file committees in every school, independent of the AEU apparatus.

The conference will be held just over a year after the union bureaucracy conspired with the state Labor government of Premier Daniel Andrews to ram through a regressive, wage-cutting industrial agreement covering around 90,000 public school workers. This deal involved a nominal wage rise of just 1 percent every 6 months, in conditions where the official inflation rate is 7 percent and the real rate is far higher for basic expenditures such as housing, fuel and groceries.

CFPE members submitted a statement with their nominations to state conference, which included the following:

“The CFPE works to develop a political movement of teachers, ES [education support] staff, and workers for a free, high-quality and secular public education system, recognised as a social right for all. We campaigned against the 2022 VGSA [Victorian government schools agreement], anti-democratically and bureaucratically rammed through by the AEU bureaucracy on behalf of the state Labor government. This delivered an enormous real wage cut as well as an unresolved time in lieu debacle, exacerbated the enormous crisis within public schools in the midst of COVID, and did nothing to deliver real reductions in untenable workloads.

“The CFPE is standing delegates to state conference, not to join the highly paid AEU bureaucracy, nor to pursue a futile

strategy of ‘pressuring’ the union leadership into defending the interests of educators. Rather, we are seeking to return power to the rank and file, developing a network of democratically-organised committees in every school to take forward a genuine struggle against the political establishment, including the government of Premier Daniel Andrews, for a fully funded public education system, with decent wages and working conditions for all staff.”

Nominee statements were to be distributed by the AEU, however, only in the event of a delegates' election triggered by having more nominees than positions.

After the initially imposed deadline for nominations closed, less than 2 percent of all delegates' positions had been filled. In the primary school sector, out of a possible 514 delegates, only 5 educators nominated themselves. In the secondary sector, 11 of the 359 positions were filled. In early childhood, it was zero of the 55 positions, and in the TAFE (Technical and Further Education) sector, 1 of the 35 delegates' roles were taken.

This extraordinarily low response reflects the advanced stage of the crisis wracking the AEU apparatus. Numerous teachers have contacted the CFPE in the past year to express their disgust with last year's sell-out agreement and explain that they have quit the AEU in protest. Others have posted their union resignations on the CFPE's Oppose the Agreement Facebook page, with some reporting that 40 percent of members had resigned from their sub-branch. The CFPE has also received multiple reports of the collapse of union sub-branches within schools.

The AEU leadership has not divulged the number of teachers and education support staff who have resigned from the union. It has extended the nomination deadline in response to the virtual collapse of its state conference delegates' structure. This was announced the day after the CFPE publicly notified educators, via social media, its membership of the conference delegation.

The AEU bureaucracy has previously run state conferences as stage-managed events. Last year's conference, held just weeks after the sell-out agreement was

ratified, provocatively featured Premier Andrews as keynote speaker.

CFPE members will oppose all moves to bureaucratically restrict and limit discussion. In the lead-up to the state conference, the CFPE is encouraging teachers and school staff to convene a meeting at their school, open to all, regardless of union membership status, and adopt one or more of the resolutions below. In order to allow the possibility for them to be discussed at state conference, they need to be submitted to the AEU central office by May 5.

Resolution 1: Against the 2022 Agreement and the union bureaucracy's anti-democratic measures!

This sub-branch opposes the anti-democratic measures taken by the Australian Education Union leadership to promote the 2022 Agreement worked out with the state Labor government. These included no mass meetings, censorship on the AEU Facebook page, disproportionate time given to union officials to speak in favour of the Agreement at delegates' meetings, and the AEU President taking the unprecedented action of emailing all members after the delegates' meetings insisting that everyone "must vote YES." The anti-democratic processes ended with the final vote counted by the employer, the Department of Education, without any independent oversight.

The Agreement has led to a substantial wage cut—nominal wage rises of less than 2 percent amount to around 5 times less than the inflation rate. Conditions in public schools remain intolerable with excessive workloads, staffing shortages caused by educators being driven out of the profession, and chronic underfunding for infrastructure and curriculum programs. This all forms part of a broader assault on the public education system that must be met with a counter-offensive, putting power and democratic control back in the hands of the rank and file teachers and school workers.

Resolution 2: For COVID-19 safety measures across the education system to save lives!

This sub-branch demands that the AEU carry out a COVID-19 survey of all members as a priority. Data should be collected on:

- how many educators have been infected, and how many times they have been infected
- the number of school workers suffering from Long COVID
- how many educators have been able to access infectious disease leave, and how many immuno-compromised educators have been forced to take personal leave.

We demand that staff be provided with appropriate sick leave entitlements allowing a full isolation period for those infected, that immuno-compromised staff have access to remote learning, and that COVID mitigation measures be

enacted including the provision of N95 masks and the proper maintenance of school buildings ventilation.

Resolution 3: Defend imprisoned journalist Julian Assange!

This sub-branch condemns the persecution of Julian Assange for his exposure of US war crimes. Teachers and educators are among those owing a debt to the WikiLeaks editor. Many of the highest ideals of a democratic public education system relate to the people's right to access accurate and relevant information. As educators, we want the young people we teach to be critical thinkers but this cannot happen when governments hide what they are doing and information is systematically censored.

We demand that the Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese end its collaboration with the drive to railroad Assange into the US courts and instead use all its diplomatic and other powers to secure his immediate and unconditional release.

The three resolutions highlight the principled work of the CFPE, providing ongoing analysis and perspective, exposing the role of the AEU, a voice for educators fighting for control to be placed in the hands of the educators through the formation of rank-and-file committees.

The CFPE encourages teachers and school staff to distribute the resolutions in schools for discussion and contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/678929646894212
www.facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

Twitter: @CFPE_Australia



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact