

Australian educators rank-and-file committee endorses Voice referendum active boycott campaign

Our correspondent
12 October 2023

The Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file network of education workers, parents and students in Australia, met online on Wednesday night and unanimously supported the Socialist Equality Party's active boycott campaign against the October 14 referendum for an indigenous Voice to the Australian parliament.

The meeting was attended by primary, secondary and tertiary teachers, as well as other education workers, parents and students. Their resolution said successive governments, Labor and Liberal-National alike, were responsible for the appalling conditions facing most Aboriginal people.

The resolution condemned the racial identity politics promoted by a privileged layer of indigenous business operators, academics and media personalities fostered by Labor and the Coalition over decades. It called for a unified struggle by the working class, indigenous and non-indigenous against the racist policies of both the Yes and No camps and their pro-capitalist agendas of austerity and war.

The opening report to the meeting was delivered by Patrick O'Connor, a leading member of the CFPE and a member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP). Before addressing the issues raised by the Voice, he denounced the Israeli assault on the people of Gaza.

O'Connor said the Netanyahu government had seized upon the uprising by the occupied Palestinian people in Gaza to prepare a massive onslaught on Gaza which had already begun. He condemned the aggressive war fever being promoted by the mainstream media, and the response of the ruling elite in the US and Australia proclaiming unlimited support for Israel's actions.

The report reviewed recent experiences of education workers in Australia and internationally, the auto

workers' strikes in the US and the increasing role that rank-and-file committees are playing in the growing struggles of the working class, against the betrayals of the trade union bureaucrats.

O'Connor said rank-and-file committees should not be restricted to workplace or industrial issues but should discuss the pressing social and political matters confronting all working-class people. "That is the basis on which we are seeking to develop a discussion here this evening on the question of the Voice."

O'Connor outlined the SEP's call for an active boycott of the referendum. He noted that the SEP's active boycott statement made it clear that the Yes and No campaigns did not represent the interests of working-class people, including working-class Aboriginal people.

O'Connor concluded by quoting from the SEP's statement: "The struggle to end the oppression of Aborigines, and the struggle for the social rights of the working class, are one and the same. They require a unified movement of the working class, regardless of race, gender and sexuality, against the capitalist profit system itself. This means the fight for socialism, placing society's resources under public ownership and democratic workers' control, thereby guaranteeing the right of all to free education, health care and all the fundamental necessities of modern life."

The report led to an extended discussion on a range of issues, including the developments in Gaza, the referendum and the conditions in public education.

There was extensive discussion on the CFPE intervention into the recent Australian Education Union state conference in Victoria, including the outright hostility of the union bureaucracy to rank-and-file teachers raising any criticism of the union. A brief report was also given on the New South Wales Teachers

Federation council meeting that endorsed a sellout agreement.

The discussion on Gaza included the impact of the aggressive pro-Israel media barrage on children and young people. A parent noted that she received an email from her son's school about setting up counselling to help support students who were affected by the mainstream media reporting. She added: "I feel for the Palestinian students who will have to deal with Australia taking sides and lighting up the Opera House [in the colours of the Israeli flag], which was disgraceful."

On the Voice referendum, a CFPE supporter said she had already decided to do an informal vote, then read our statement and was very pleased with the position it advanced. She noted that two prominent Yes campaigners, Marcia Langton and Noel Pearson, were proponents for major mining company Adani.

A teacher posted in the chat: "I think the statement is very important, as it clearly demonstrates that the Voice is a sham which will not offer any help to the indigenous working class."

A retired teacher spoke on the terrible conditions in public schools in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, which was reported on the WSWS. He explained that the educational outcomes in these schools were the result of decades of neglect by both Liberal and Labor governments.

The CFPE urges education workers across Australia to support its resolution on the Voice referendum, printed below, share it with fellow workers and on social media and contact us:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation
Twitter: @CFPE_Australia

CFPE resolution on the Voice referendum

Wednesday, October 11, 2023

This meeting of the CFPE endorses the Socialist Equality Party's stance of an active boycott of the Albanese Labor government's Voice referendum.

The appalling conditions facing Aboriginal people are the result of deliberate policies of successive governments both Labor and Liberal. Policies that are driven by the interests of the ruling class.

The ideological basis for the Voice is racial identity

politics promoted by a tiny privileged layer of indigenous business operators, academics and media personalities fostered by Labor and the Coalition over decades. The SEP insists that the fundamental division in society, including in the indigenous population, is class, not race.

The Voice is a means of further incorporating into the capitalist class and the state apparatus a wealthy indigenous layer. According to the blueprint drawn up by indigenous Professors Marcia Langton and Tom Calma the Voice would be a thoroughly anti-democratic institution. It would be an unelected body chosen by acknowledged leaders and subject to character tests and vetting by an equally unelected ethics council.

In education, funding cuts and the implementation of regressive policies have done nothing to close the gap. Many schools with large numbers of Aboriginal students are not receiving adequate support. Often these schools are in remote and very remote locations. This is a breach of the basic social right that every child has access to free, high-quality education.

The Socialist Equality Party's advocacy of an active boycott is to expose and oppose the whole referendum throughout the working class. This is not passive abstention but a form of collective action to advance the independent interests of the working class both indigenous and non-indigenous alike. That is essential to prepare for the momentous class struggles ahead—regardless of whether the referendum passes or fails—against the agenda of war and austerity.

Note: Under conditions of compulsory voting, which makes it a crime to urge a boycott of the vote itself, the SEP calls on workers and youth to register their opposition by casting informal ballots and join our active boycott campaign in the lead-up to October 14, that goes well beyond the individual act of voting.

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To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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