

Debate blocked at Australian Education Union “briefing” on sellout deal in Victoria

Our correspondent
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The Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the educators’ rank-and file network, urges all educators and workers to join its online national public meeting this Sunday, June 14 at 11 a.m. to discuss how to develop and broaden the fight against the sellout deal between the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the Victorian state Labor government, and the underlying austerity and war agenda of the federal Labor government. Click here to register.

A meeting held by the Australian Education Union (AEU) on June 1—billed as a “briefing” for members ahead of a ratification vote on the AEU’s sellout deal with the Victorian state Labor government—provided a sharp demonstration of the trade union bureaucracy’s determination to deny educators any genuine democratic voice.

Following a large and broadly backed 24-hour strike on March 24, AEU officials rushed into closed-door talks with Premier Jacinta Allan’s government to seal a proposed four-year enterprise agreement. The agreement imposes yet another pay cut in real terms, does nothing to address unsustainable workloads or ballooning class sizes, and strips teachers and Education Support (ES) staff of the right to strike until 2030.

Facing widespread opposition, the AEU leadership is now trying to drive the deal through using undemocratic methods. The AEU’s conduct at the Melbourne Inner West meeting, underlines the anti-democratic character of its broader campaign to push through the regressive agreement.

Before the proceedings commenced, Will Marshall, a long time teacher and member of the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators’ network, attempted to move a procedural motion to amend the agenda so that, alongside the AEU’s presentation, members would have time to present, debate and vote on resolutions—with the meeting extended if necessary to ensure nothing was rushed or excluded.

AEU officials immediately ruled the motion out of order. Their justification was revealing. The AEU state council, they claimed, had designated such gatherings as “briefings,” not union meetings, and therefore no resolutions could be taken. When Marshall dissented from the ruling, officials declared that no dissent motion was possible because “no one was formally chairing the meeting.” Marshall addressed the audience saying:

“This shows the anti-democratic nature of the AEU. Teachers and ES staff can’t even put their own resolutions two weeks out from a vote.”

The resolution Marshall sought to move was the following:

We call on all teachers and Education Support (ES) staff to vote NO to the proposed industrial agreement being pushed through by the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the state Labor government. This deal entrenches the effective 10 percent real wage cut educators have suffered since 2021, with fixed pay rises that fall well short of inflation and no cost-of-living protection — at a time when the US-Israeli war on Iran is already driving up energy and commodity prices and threatening to push inflation significantly higher.

Far from addressing crushing workloads, staff shortages and oversized classes, the agreement divides the workforce by offering ES staff a mere one-off allowance in place of a genuine wage increase, and strips all educators of the right to take protected industrial action until 2030.

This agreement must be rejected. We call on educators to vote NO and to begin building independent rank-and-file committees in every school, taking the struggle out of the hands of a union leadership that has demonstrated time and again it serves the government and employer — not the workers it claims to represent.

This resolution was never put to educators as the AEU ensured it could not even be moved, let alone debated and voted upon. That is itself a damning indictment of the process surrounding this agreement.

Members of the CFPE had distributed this leaflet at the meeting, explaining the need for a break from the antidemocratic AEU apparatus and the formation of rank-and-file committees to take control of the fight against real pay cuts and intolerable conditions.

One teacher attending the meeting, who said she was about to resign from the union, angrily told the AEU leaders running the

meeting to “go back to the government” rather than “treating us with contempt and disrespect.” She said the main issue on the log of claims was teacher’s enormous workloads, which the AEU agreement did nothing to resolve. There was widespread applause for this.

Another local teacher said the meeting was not democratic at all, as teachers were not able to put forward their own motions. He referred to censorship of oppositional comments on the union’s social media pages. He asked: “Are you committed to any democratic process?” The officials replied that this was a briefing, not meant to be democratic.

After the officials told the room that they could not negotiate an improvement to classroom sizes because there are not enough teachers employed in Victoria, an ES worker declared: “Teachers are quitting because the conditions are horrific, that’s why there’s a shortage. If you want more education staff, then fix the conditions!” This also won significant applause.

An anti-democratic record

The June 1 events were not an aberration but the continuation of the methods the AEU machine has employed for years.

In May 2021, for example, in the leadup to the 2022 agreement sellout, the *World Socialist Web Site* documented an online “town hall” in which the AEU disabled the chat, muted all participants, blocked the “raise hand” function, and announced at the outset that “there won’t be anything like motions.” Questions could only be submitted in writing, and officials selectively chose which to read aloud. The meeting was stage managed to prevent educators from discussing their own conditions.

Likewise, in the current ratification process, online “information” sessions had the chat disabled, participants could not see one another’s comments and, in one case at least, the meeting was shut down after a single question. These are not technical glitches but deliberate mechanisms to control the narrative.

There is no forum anywhere within the AEU where teachers and Education Support staff can collectively deliberate on the proposed agreement.

At best, members may discuss issues within their individual school sub branches. But there is no mechanism for educators from different workplaces to meet, compare experiences, test arguments or advance collective positions. The membership has been denied the most basic democratic right to examine, support or reject the agreement on their own terms. The AEU bureaucracy has monopolised communication at every level.

This monopoly extends to the ratification vote itself. It is not a one member one vote ballot. Instead, a single

delegate—automatically assigned based on the AEU’s internal database—casts votes on behalf of every 20 financial members. The AEU controls the database and is hugely invested in pushing through the deal it has with the state Labor government. There are no rank-and-file scrutineers and no mechanism for members to verify that their sub branch’s votes were recorded accurately or that the aggregate count reflects the will of the membership.

This suppression of dissent and discussion is driven by political fear. The AEU abruptly cancelled even its limited regional half day stoppages via an early morning email in early May, precisely when Melbourne council workers, Victorian public health workers, and ACT educators were preparing industrial action of their own. The bureaucracy feared the dispute might link up with a broader working-class movement, posing a political crisis for both the Allan state government and the Albanese federal government.

The CFPE calls on every educator—teacher and ES worker alike—to vote NO at their sub-branch meeting, and to take up the fight to build independent rank-and-file committees in every school: organisations democratically controlled by educators themselves, capable of breaking through the censorship the AEU imposes, demanding full transparency and a genuine one-educator-one-vote ballot, and connecting the struggle in Victorian schools with the broader movement of workers confronting Labor’s program of austerity and war.

We urge educators and others to register to attend our online meeting: “Vote No to AEU-Labor sellout! Build independent rank-and-file committees! Fund education not war!”

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

Twitter: [CFPE_Australia](https://twitter.com/CFPE_Australia)

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout



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