

Australian pseudo-left tries to head off rebellion against Labor-union sellout of Victorian teachers

Committee for Public Education
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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 and the Victorian state Labor government, and the underlying austerity and war agenda of the federal Labor government. Click here to register.

A sellout industrial agreement between the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the Victorian Labor government has provoked widespread opposition from teachers and support staff.

The deal, which the AEU leadership is trying to ram through with the most anti-democratic methods, features real-wage cuts amid the cost-of-living crisis, and would do nothing to address soaring class sizes, workloads and other conditions that amount to a breakdown of the public education system.

The Committee for Public Education (CFPE), a rank-and-file teachers' network, is calling for a "No" vote to the agreement. But that is only the start.

Teachers are confronted with the reality that the AEU bureaucracy is a hostile apparatus, working against educators on behalf of the Labor government and the corporate elite. That is why the CFPE calls for the establishment of rank-and-file committees, independent of the bureaucracy and controlled by teachers themselves, to coordinate a fight against the sellout.

Such committees must expose the AEU's lies, break the isolation it imposes on educators, and organise political and industrial action that unites teachers across the state and the country, as well as other sections of the working class. This is a political fight against the Labor governments in Victoria and federally, which are carrying out sweeping cuts to education, healthcare, disability and other social services to make workers pay for the crisis of capitalism.

Amid teachers' opposition to the sellout, pseudo-left groups, closely tied to the AEU, are trying to prevent the required rank-and-file rebellion. The misnamed "Socialists in Schools" organisation, a front group of Socialist Alternative (SAIt), is a loyal, or more accurately, fake opposition to the AEU bureaucracy.

"Socialists in Schools" has bemoaned the sellout agreement, but has advanced no perspective to fight it. It insists that teachers must remain within the framework controlled by the AEU bureaucracy and make plaintive appeals to it.

The bankruptcy of that line is evident in an article published on SAIt's *Red Flag* website last Sunday.

The article notes the almost dictatorial measures being used by the

AEU bureaucracy to ram through the agreement, from "Absurd meeting procedures, the tyrannical deleting of comments and blocking of critical members on AEU social media, and, most importantly, the fact that many sub-branches are deliberately kept completely disconnected from one another."

The ratification process itself is anti-democratic to the core. It is not a one-member-one-vote ballot. A single delegate casts votes for every 20 financial members after a sub-branch meeting at school level. The AEU controls the database. The AEU announces the outcome. 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 is honest.

But having pointed to these realities, the *Red Flag* article did not even suggest that teachers begin to organise outside the anti-democratic AEU-controlled framework. The dominance of the apparatus, even as it is running roughshod over democratic procedures, had to be upheld. Delegates should merely vote no, and hope that in the wake of the ballot, the AEU leadership calls some strikes.

It stated, "If we reject this offer and resume a campaign of industrial action, like many members want to do, it is an open question as to what we win, but it is highly unlikely we would get anything less." That is mutiny on one's knees, or, in reality, no mutiny at all. Under conditions where the AEU has made clear it will do everything to ram through the deal, the pseudo-left is calling on teachers to leave the fate of the dispute in the hands of the AEU leaders themselves.

That is the role "Socialists in Schools" has played throughout. It supported and uncritically promoted the AEU's log of claims when it was unveiled last year. The pay claim, for a 35 percent wage increase over 4 years, was woefully inadequate. It would not have made up for the real wage cuts inflicted on teachers in the 2022 sellout, which mandated pay "increases" of less than 2 percent per year, including at the height of the cost-of-living crisis.

But more fundamentally, the pseudo-left presented the log of claims as good coin. It was obvious, from the entire record of the union, that the claim was a ruse intended to head off opposition from teachers and that the AEU had no intention of fighting for it. "Socialists in Schools" promoted that ruse, providing the bureaucracy with time to cook up the sellout that it is now pushing.

When the AEU was compelled to call a 24-hour strike on March 24, "Socialists in Schools" was jubilant. Their members handed out flyers promoting the stoppage as a genuine struggle by the AEU. In reality, it was a cynical attempt to let off steam, with the bureaucracy signalling

even before the strike was held that it would wind down industrial action afterwards and resume backroom negotiations with the government.

“Socialists in Schools” issued a “strike handbook” which it distributed on March 24 and since. The eight-page document is a compendium of lies and falsifications, aimed at fostering illusions in the AEU leadership among teachers.

The handbook was compelled to note that under the state Labor government, in office since 2014, the assault on public education had escalated on every front. But it did not so much as mention the AEU’s role in that offensive. Every four years, over that period, the AEU has rammed through a sellout agreement in partnership with Labor, suppressing teachers’ wages and intensifying the crisis in schools.

The silence was not a mistake. It was because the entire thrust of the handbook was to limit teachers to polite suggestions to the AEU bureaucrats. Teachers, it raised, should encourage the AEU to call more strikes. “Labor will be under some pressure to deliver an agreement in the lead up to the state election,” the handbook declared. “We must capitalise on this pressure by taking strike action early in the year.”

The whole schema is a fraud. The presentation of the AEU leadership and the Labor government as opponents is false. They are flesh of flesh, and blood of blood.

And the claim that Labor is about to grant reforms flies in the face of reality. The whole thrust of its program, as a party of big business, is to carry out sweeping cuts to social spending.

Those cuts, implemented over decades, are only being intensified amid the global crisis of capitalism, which finds one sharp expression in the indebtedness of Victoria. Labor is responding, not only by attacking teachers, but by carrying out mass public sector sackings, pay cuts across every sector and the destruction of what little remains of public housing.

The idea that a handful of token strikes, under the leadership of Labor’s allies in the AEU will reverse this offensive, is a sham.

To justify its line, “Socialists in Schools” has resorted to outright lies. In the handbook and subsequent articles, it has claimed that teachers in other states have received improved pay as a result of such limited strike campaigns applying pressure to big-business governments.

Under a heading, “Do strikes work?” the handbook cites as proof that “NSW [New South Wales] teachers struck multiple times in 2021-2022. They are now the best paid in the country...” That is simply a cover for sellouts by the NSW Teachers Federation, and attacks by NSW governments, Liberal and Labor alike.

The 2022 Industrial Relations Commission award locked in pay increases that year and the previous of just 2.5 percent and 3 percent, i.e., real wage cuts. The 2023 agreement, hailed by Labor and the union as “historic,” included a pay rise of around 8 percent, not even enough to make up for the reductions over the previous two years and only scarcely above record inflation. And an agreement the very next year locked teachers into wage increases of 3 percent per annum for three years, i.e., continuous real wage cuts.

The phony glorification of the conditions of teachers in other states, under conditions where public schools are in crisis everywhere, promotes illusions that a deal between the AEU and the Victorian Labor government will resolve the situation. It also divides Victorian teachers from their counterparts in other states, directly serving the interests of the governments and the ruling elite itself.

“Socialists in schools” similarly hailed the 2024 Victorian nurses

agreement as a great victory, claiming that union-led strikes had compelled the state government to provide a 28.4 percent pay increase. In reality, the increase was staged over several years, with the largest component not due until 2027. For most classifications, increases were approximately 5 percent in 2024, 4.2 percent in 2025, 4.1 percent in 2026, and 12.7 percent in 2027. Nurses remain not only woefully underpaid but, like teachers, are confronted with a public hospital system in crisis.

The fact that “Socialists in Schools” presents defeats as victories is a warning to teachers that this is not a bona fide opposition at all. Having bolstered illusions in the AEU leadership, as the current sellout was being prepared, it is now creating the conditions for the most minor pay increases to be hailed as a step forward. The real political dynamic is that the Labor government seeks to impose attacks in the interests of the corporate elite; those attacks are enforced by the union bureaucracy; and the pseudo-left confuses, misdirects and neuters opposition among workers.

Teachers must break out of this entire framework. The CFPE insists that now is the time to form rank-and-file committees, at every school. Such committees can organise the largest “No” vote possible. They can enable teachers to take control of the struggle, including through genuine democratic discussion, outside the control of the union bureaucrats, and the formulation of demands reflecting what is needed, not what governments say is affordable, such as an immediate pay rise that compensates for past losses and soaring inflation, genuine limits to class sizes and to workloads.

The struggles of educators, like those of health workers, inherently raise the need for a new political perspective that rejects the subordination of these vital areas of society to the profit demands of big business and the governments that represent them. That is a socialist perspective, based on the fight for a workers’ government, that would place the banks and the corporations under public ownership and democratic workers’ control, and inject tens of billions into the schools, hospitals and other vital areas, to ensure decent pay and conditions for teachers and quality public education for all.

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