Australia: Reject the AEU's false "unity" claim! Vote No in the all-staff ballot of Victorian educators!

Committee for Public Education
8 September 2026

The Committee for Public Education (CFPE) urges all Victorian public school teachers and education support (ES) staff—union and non-union alike—to vote No in the all-staff ballot on the latest version of the sellout agreement struck between the state Labor government and the Australian Education Union (AEU).

The AEU apparatus is desperate to impose its deal. Having failed to secure a genuine mandate from its own members—a 79 percent Yes vote manufactured through rushed ballots, suppressed debate and misinformation—the union bureaucracy has declared that for the sake of unity, both AEU and non-union members must vote Yes.

In a video, AEU president Justin Mullaly declared, "now it's time for absolutely everybody to say yes and deliver on the agreement… everybody gets to have their say, everybody can endorse the agreement and we can move to the next steps." He then called on non-members to join the union.

Mullaly insisted that non-members must vote Yes—for the sake of unity. Those who quit the union in the past in disgust or never joined, and never had any say in the AEU's rotten deal are being dragooned into trying to legitimise it.

But the video also betrayed a telling nervousness. Mullaly knows that union members will be given another vote in this ballot, and that those who voted Yes last time, or did not vote at all, may switch to No, as the nature of the betrayal becomes clearer.

The four-year agreement is unchanged in substance from the versions previously rejected by AEU members, with only cosmetic alterations. It embeds the face-to-face teaching hours—18.5 for secondary, 21 for primary—that are driving stress and burnout and pushing thousands out of the profession.

The much-vaunted clause halving the number of meetings educators must participate in is meaningless when teachers routinely work 50-hour weeks. The headline pay figure of 28 to 32 percent over four years is a further real wage cut under conditions of soaring mortgages, rents and prices. A $2,000 "sign-on" sweetener—roughly two months of groceries for a family—does nothing to reverse the roughly 10 percent real wage loss since the last AEU sellout in 2022.

And a "No Further Claims" no-strike clause locks these conditions in until 2030, precisely as educators are placed on the frontline of the Albanese government's gutting of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which will throw thousands of additional children with complex needs into public schools without funding or specialist resources.

Furthermore, the vague promise by newly installed Premier Ben Carroll to fully fund Victorian schools under the inadequate Gonski plan has not even been included in the AEU-Labor agreement.

Union and non-union members alike owe no loyalty to a bureaucracy that did not represent them in negotiations. They should carefully consider the real content and implications of the deal—not the manufactured "unity" Mullaly is demanding.

Victorian educators twice struck—the first statewide stoppages in decades, winning widespread public support—and twice voted down earlier versions of the same agreement. These were the first rejections of an AEU-endorsed deal in over 40 years. Faced with this rebellion, the union has initiated a scare campaign: accept this betrayal or face a worse deal in the Fair Work Commission or under a right-wing One Nation or Liberal government.

"Everybody gets to have their say" is a cynical inversion: the only "say" on offer is Yes. There is no

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invitation to debate the agreement, no acknowledgement of the two waves of rejection, no answer to the educators who voted no. The promise that "we can move to the next steps" exposes the bureaucracy's real aim—to foreclose discussion, deliver the government its deal and get on with the business of policing the workforce.

Mullally's appeal is not a democratic gesture toward those outside the union. It is the logic of the union bureaucracy laid bare: unable to win the argument, it seeks to bury opposition beneath a manufactured majority.

The public school system across Australia is buckling under chronic underfunding, staff shortages, impossible workloads and rising levels of violence and distress. Teachers work an average of 46.5 hours a week, with nearly two-thirds reporting high stress and more than 80 percent saying their work harms their mental health.

The problems are most acute in disadvantaged working-class schools, where almost 67 percent of principals report staffing shortages. A major study found that teachers experience secondary traumatic stress at levels higher than psychologists, mental health nurses and paramedics.

These conditions are not the product of isolated policy failures. They are the outcome of a deliberate, long-term assault on public education, carried out by successive Labor and Liberal-National governments and policed by the education unions.

Governments have used the so-called Schooling Resource Standard to massively overfund elite private schools while public schools remain underfunded by billions. Meanwhile, the federal budget slashes social spending while pouring hundreds of billions into AUKUS submarines and preparations for war.

In this crisis, the AEU has functioned not as an organisation of struggle but as industrial police. Its bureaucrats, many earning around a quarter of a million dollars a year—more than double the average teacher's wage—have for decades suppressed opposition, isolated disputes and imposed wage-cutting agreements.

The response by two pseudo-left groups, Socialists in Schools and Fight the Crisis, to the AEU ballot results is politically revealing. Both falsely claim that educators have won gains in the latest deal and even democratised the AEU in the process! Aware of the continuing discontent, Fight the Crisis initially called for a No vote in the all-staff ballot, but has gone silent on that. These groups function as the last line of defence for the pro-business Labor governments and the union bureaucrats who enforce their agenda.

Everything that educators have been through proves what the CFPE warned from the outset: the union apparatus cannot be reformed. It must be dismantled and replaced. What is needed is a new form of working-class organisation: independent rank-and-file committees in every school, democratically controlled by educators themselves, uniting union and non-union educators, and linking with health workers, nurses and public sector employees confronting similar assaults.

To all educators, we say contact the CFPE, the educators' rank-and-file network, and the recently established Victorian Educators Rank-and-File Committee to discuss how to fight the sellout.

These committees can develop and advance demands based on the needs of educators and students, not what governments and the financial markets say is "affordable." These demands could include:

- an immediate 40 percent wage increase to recover past losses, with salaries indexed to inflation
- maximum class sizes of 15 to 20 students
- a minimum of eight hours of guaranteed planning time each week
- full funding for students with disabilities
- the redirection of billions from military expansion and elite private school subsidies into a free, first-class public education for every child.

These demands raise the need for a socialist perspective. The resources for a world-class public education system exist, but they are monopolised by billionaires and funnelled into war.

The crisis in schools will not be resolved by a new AEU-government agreement. The working class, organised independently of the trade union bureaucracy and the Labor Party, must take the struggle for public education out of the hands of the corporate boardrooms and their governments, and fight to place the wealth of society under public ownership and democratic workers' control.

To discuss these issues and for assistance in forming rank-and-file committees, contact the CFPE:

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