

# Support the August 20th meeting for Victorian teachers! Schools must be safe workplaces during the covid pandemic!

In an important development, a group of teachers in Melbourne, Australia, organising out of the [MESJ \(Melbourne Educators for Social and Environmental Justice\) Facebook page](#), have begun organising online, cross sub-branch meetings. These meetings are to allow Australian Education Union(AEU) sub-branches to organise at a rank and file level to fight for safe working conditions during the covid pandemic. The first meeting was attended by over fifty teachers from nine different sub-branches from government schools. This fight has become necessary in the face of the Andrews Labor Government's disregard for teachers' safety by keeping schools open for senior students during Term 3, even as cases skyrocketed; and by the AEU's complete capitulation to the government's callous agenda. The next meeting is planned for August 20<sup>th</sup> at 4PM.

As part of its determination to keep the economy fully open, the Andrews government insisted that in Term 3 schools be open for senior students, children of "essential workers", and schools for children with disabilities . Yet, when Term 3 started on July 27th, there were already over 200 cases a day being reported. This resulted in over seventy schools being closed temporarily, and a school in Northern Melbourne becoming one of the largest clusters in the state in the period leading up to the announcement of Stage 4 restrictions on August 2nd, which finally saw all schools return to remote learning within the Melbourne metropolitan area. Currently

teachers at regional state special schools are still working on site despite growing case numbers in some regional centres and without any provision for pandemic leave when getting tested.

The AEU's role in this was scandalous. As late as July 31<sup>st</sup>, at a Victorian State Council meeting, AEU officials argued against a motion demanding a return to remote learning for all students on the basis that many members opposed this measure and wanted instead "flexibility". The motion moved by MESJ associated councillors was defeated. Even the Australian Principal Association had [demanded during the previous week](#), a return to remote learning in Melbourne.

## August 20th MESJ cross-sub-branch meeting

The proposed agenda for the upcoming meeting on August 20<sup>th</sup> is as follows:

- 1. Remote teaching conditions** – how are things going now and what do we need?
- 2. Assessment, reporting and VCE** – what alternatives would be preferable to business as usual?
- 3. Return to on-site teaching conditions** – when would this be safe and what should it look like?
- 4. Next steps** – how can we stay connected and make sure our needs are met?

[Details on the meeting and how to join can be found on the MESJ Facebook group.](#)

This initiative of the MESJ to organise cross sub-branch meetings must be supported by the broadest section of AEU members as possible across as many schools as possible. The initiative of the MESJ for cross sub-branch meetings should be replicated in other Australian states, particularly in NSW where community transition is still significant. Consideration should also be given on how to include non-unionised layers of teachers into this struggle.

## **This is an international struggle**

This must be seen as part of the broader struggles internationally against the drive to force teachers back into the classroom whilst this pandemic rages. Tens of thousands of teachers in the US are currently fighting against the bipartisan Democrat and Republican drive to reopen the schools. Devastating stories of teachers, and even students, being asked to sign legal waivers if they get sick and die, are emerging from the US. Similar struggles are occurring in Germany and elsewhere. The capitalist ruling class is determined to open schools— not as they claim for the “benefit of students”, but because schools are needed to function as child minding centers for workers as part of the drive to reopen economies to protect the profits of the rich. Teachers care about their students and their futures, but education can't be run in-person if it means both students and teachers are dying. This is why remote learning must be continued until the ruling class takes the actions necessary to get the Corona virus pandemic under control. Teachers, as workers, have the right to organize. They alone must decide when it is safe to return to the classroom.

Other workers internationally, from distribution, mining, and construction, to healthcare settings, manufacturing and

others, all face the same pressures to return to work under unsafe conditions. Links must be made between all these struggles, and they are starting to be made. This week on Twitter the #GeneralStrike was trending in recognition of this commonality of struggle.

**SAFE WORKPLACES FOR ALL TEACHERS AND ALL WORKERS! TEACHERS MUST DECIDE WHEN ITS SAFE TO RETURN TO ON SITE TEACHING.**

*Support the MESJ's initiative, join the cross sub-branch meeting on August 20<sup>th</sup> if you are a teacher and please spread amongst your networks!*

***Please note: classconscious.org has no affiliation with MESJ***

*It is only through and open and robust discussion scientific socialism, ie Marxism has developed. Classconscious.org would like to play its role in developing such a culture again. We are attempting to foster debate by publishing articles that may not fully align with the position of our editorial collective.*