

Australia: Growing unrest among teachers amid union-government talks in Victoria

Susan Allan**13 November 2025**

Negotiations have begun in Victoria between the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the state Labor government for a new three-year enterprise agreement covering teachers, school principals and education support staff.

These talks occur amid growing educator opposition, not only in Victoria but nationally, as teachers in Queensland and Tasmania also fight real wage cuts, intolerable workloads and the worsening crisis in public education.

Across Australia, teachers report burnout, untenable workloads, mass resignations, rising violence in under-resourced schools and severe staff shortages. Many schools now function as holding facilities rather than centres of learning.

Victoria, the second-largest public education system, sits at the centre of a crisis, with some of the lowest school funding and wages after more than 11 years of a state Labor government, currently headed by Premier Jacinta Allan.

After pushing through a major sellout in the last agreement in 2022, resulting in real pay cuts, token workload relief and no enforceable class size limits, the AEU leaders are again trying to restrict and isolate industrial action by teachers as much as possible.

Despite growing and complex responsibilities, educators' real wages have stagnated for years, far below the \$147,000 needed to buy a median-priced Melbourne home. New graduate teachers start at just \$73,499 and education support staff earn as little as \$60,000, often employed part-time.

Decades of underfunding and wage suppression have left the profession in crisis. Teachers routinely work up to 60 hours a week, including 12–14 unpaid hours, and 90 percent report moderate to severe stress.

Only one in three educators plan to remain in public schools until retirement, citing excessive workloads, low pay and deteriorating classroom conditions. More than 1,000 vacancies exist statewide, projected to rise to 5,000 by 2028.

These conditions are the result of Labor and Liberal governments alike inflicting restructuring, budget cuts,

privatisation and testing regimes such as NAPLAN, enforced by sellout union agreements that serve government austerity, not educators.

The outcome is a two-tier system. Elite private schools have Olympic-grade sports centres and top-tier facilities, while public schools are forced to fundraise for basic resources.

Behind the backs of educators, the Allan government secretly withdrew over \$3 billion in public school funding over six years by postponing promised increases from 2028 to 2031. The decision, buried in budget papers, only emerged after internal documents were leaked.

This exposes the fraud of the Albanese government's "Better and Fairer Schools Agreement," which claimed to eventually put public schools on a path to full funding, as per the Gonski funding model, which is itself totally inadequate

In reality, most federal funding was pushed into the 2030s. In 2023, Victoria funded its schools at just 68.76 percent of the Gonski School Resource Standard.

The \$3 billion cut is part of a broader austerity drive as the debt-ridden Labor government slashes public services, jobs and infrastructure under the dictates of credit agencies and corporate interests.

While public schools deteriorate, billions flow into policing, corporate infrastructure and construction subsidies. Military-linked programs in schools are expanding, including training programs linked to the AUKUS pact preparations for war against China. The state government has partnered with BAE Systems and signed a memorandum with Rolls-Royce to develop "nuclear skills" academies.

As "defence career pathways" are promoted, teachers are told there is "no money" for education.

At a recent closed-door business event, Education Minister Ben Carroll cynically said teachers "deserve nationally competitive wages," but school principals have confirmed there is no budget allocation for staffing or salary increases next year.

Carroll's remarks aim to defuse the growing anger among

educators, after Queensland teachers overwhelmingly rejected an 8 percent offer and Tasmanian teachers followed suit. Likewise, the AEU welcomed his comments, urging educators to “trust the process” and “continue negotiations in good faith.”

The union’s function is to contain and block unrest. As in 2022, the AEU has confined teachers to token actions, after-hours rallies and letter-writing campaigns. These staged diversions maintain appearances of opposition but seek to keep all action trapped within the union’s bureaucratic framework.

The parallels with the 2021–2022 sellout are clear. The AEU’s 2021 log of claims called for 7 percent annual wage rises, extra superannuation, class size caps of 20 and a reduction in face-to-face teaching to 18 hours per week.

During negotiations, the union promoted a “week of action” consisting of wearing red, hanging posters, posting on social media, lobbying MPs and attending online meetings tightly controlled by officials. No coordinated strike action was organised, even though more than 90 percent of members voted for it at the end of 2021. There has been no strike action since 2013.

None of the 2021 claims on wages or workload materialised. The 2022 agreement delivered pay rises of less than 2 percent a year while inflation neared 8 percent. The sellout was pushed through via AEU misinformation and censorship. Nearly 40 percent of educators voted to reject the deal and nearly 9,000 teachers resigned from the union in protest.

The AEU’s 2025 log of claims is just as fraudulent. It calls for a 35 percent wage rise, smaller class sizes, workload reductions and increased allied health and education support staffing. This is after 716 AEU sub-branch submissions, the highest ever, reflecting the anger and frustration among educators.

Teachers must be warned. Despite the widespread readiness to fight, the AEU bureaucracy—headed by President Justin Mullaly on a salary between \$230,000 and \$250,000—has no intention of waging any such struggle.

Even the class size clauses in the AEU log of claims replicate the same loopholes as in 2022. Principals need only “consult” staff, a non-binding process leaving them with final veto. By citing “fixed resources” and “available facilities,” schools can exceed limits whenever staffing, space or funding is claimed to be insufficient, as exists across Victoria.

Although the clause lists targets of 18 students for P–2, 20 for Years 3–12 and eight in special schools, these are planning guidelines, not enforceable limits. Counting students on Individual Education Plans as two students is contingent on funding and easily ignored. The supposed

workload “relief” for oversized classes mirrors the 2022 deal, largely impossible due to shortages.

In reality, the 2025 log of claims is designed as a safety valve to dissipate discontent and keep teachers trapped within the union framework. Its outcome is entirely predictable—another AEU-Labor sellout dressed up as progress but confined to budgetary restraints.

An AEU faction centred on the pseudo-left group Solidarity has attempted to channel teacher opposition back into the arms of the union apparatus. Standing in last year’s AEU elections under the slogan “Fight the Crisis,” they argued the union could be “reclaimed” by “rebuilding activism” and pushing for more militant action to pressure the Labor government.

This obscures the AEU’s decades-long role as the chief mechanism enforcing wage cuts, workloads and the dismantling of public education. The AEU is structurally tied to the Labor Party, committed to industrial discipline and budget restraint. By insisting educators remain within the apparatus suppressing their struggle, Solidarity is trying to divert genuine opposition into a dead end.

The fight to defend public education is inseparable from confronting the political and economic order of capitalism that prioritises profit, elite private schools and military spending over the needs of society.

Teachers, support staff, parents and students must form rank-and-file committees in every school, democratic organisations that are independent of the union bureaucracy, through which they can unite with teachers and other workers nationally and internationally who confront similar appalling conditions.

The Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the educators’ rank-and-file network, calls for:

A 40 percent wage increase, indexed to inflation

Class size caps of 15–20 students

At least 8 hours of in-school planning time weekly

The hiring of thousands of teachers and education support staff

- Fully funded psychologists and welfare staff in every school**

An end to all public funding for elite private schools

For further information contact the CFPE:

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