

# Australia: Tasmanian teachers strike again but unions block a unified fight

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The crisis engulfing public education has again been exposed in Tasmania, where teachers and support staff have taken their second strike in two months. Last Friday, educators across the Australian island state walked off the job for half a day, closing most public schools in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie.

The Australian Education Union (AEU) has refused to lead a genuine fight against the minority state Liberal government's austerity regime, which has driven educators to breaking point. While teachers have stopped work twice since October, the AEU leadership continues to isolate their struggle from those of other public sector workers and similar battles in Queensland and Victoria, blocking a national fight against low pay and onerous workloads.

The stoppage was held in support of school support staff, teachers' assistants, cleaners, lab technicians, library and admin staff. They are among the lowest-paid workers and head into the Christmas break without a pay rise. These essential workers face weeks of unpaid stand-down over the holidays, unlike their mainland counterparts.

AEU Tasmania branch president David Genford told the Hobart rally that staff were fed up with a government that "does not want to respect us." He claimed the union had "no choice" but to strike after failed negotiations in the second-to-last week of the school year. He noted that the government could fund a billion-dollar football stadium while ordering restraint from public sector workers.

The opposition Labor Party and the Greens have postured as defenders of teachers. But Greens MP Vica Bayley's call for "pay parity with mainland counterparts" and Labor leader Josh Willie's appeal for negotiations in "good faith" are empty phrases that cover up the central issue: years of bipartisan enforcement of cuts to public education.

Tasmanian teachers are now the second-lowest paid in

Australia. This did not arise overnight. It is the product of decades of attacks by successive governments, including the Labor-Greens administration formed after the 2010 election, which enforced austerity budgets, closed schools and deepened the erosion of public education.

What is happening in Tasmania is part of a global offensive in which governments cut funding, push privatisation and prioritise corporate profit and war spending. Educators from South Korea, the UK and the US are striking over parallel policies.

The core issues driving the strikes are intolerable workloads, under-staffing and unsafe classrooms. Teachers are forced to manage students with complex needs, such as those on the autism spectrum, and students traumatised by family breakdown, often without resources or assistance.

Teaching staff are working beyond school hours catching up on emails, wellbeing referrals, attendance and lesson planning. This is compounded by a rise in violence in schools, reports of which have nearly tripled since 2022, under conditions of a broader cost-of-living and social crisis. Educators report concussions and other injuries from student assaults.

One teacher stated on social media: "[I]t's not just a pay dispute—it's about conditions, especially the escalation of violence against staff by students. Things that are making staff leave in droves and that can't just be fixed with a bit more pay."

Another wrote: "Why in this day and age are we having to fight so hard for a minor pay rise? We should have national awards and automatic CPI increases. Now workers are begging for a few silver coins, and every occupation is paid differently depending on the State you live in."

The AEU's log of claims includes addressing violence, a 21.5 percent wage increase over three years, starting with 11 percent in the first year, and improved career

progression.

Premier Jeremy Rockliff's Liberal government has rejected these demands, in line with the under-funding and austerity program of the federal Albanese Labor government, alongside soaring military spending and expanded funding for elite private schools.

The government's offer, a meagre 3 percent one-year increase, was overwhelmingly rejected by teachers and other public sector workers. Education Minister Jo Palmer denounced the strike as "disruptive," while Rockliff declared the pay rise "unaffordable." These claims ring hollow when state politicians have just received a one-off 22 percent pay rise.

The AEU bureaucracy is not opposing austerity but pleading for talks that will subordinate teachers' demands to "budget repair." Its aim is to dissipate anger through limited actions such as half-day strikes. Genford said AEU members "didn't want to interrupt school at all" underscoring the bureaucracy's opposition to any real fight. The union's claims serve as bargaining chips to steer the dispute back into negotiations within the confines set by the government.

Conditions nationwide are marked by real wage cuts, relentless underfunding and impossible workloads. Labor and Liberal governments, assisted by the union apparatuses, enforce austerity dictated by corporate interests, including cuts affecting thousands of public sector jobs. The AEU and its state affiliates deliberately divide teachers by state, isolating each struggle.

In Queensland, teachers staged a second 24-hour strike in late November, the first time two full-day stoppages have occurred in 16 years, following the overwhelming rejection of the Liberal National Party's insulting 8 percent offer. The Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) bureaucracy is now allowing arbitration by the pro-employer Industrial Relations Commission (QIRC), which will ban industrial action after December 31.

In Victoria, government-union bargaining continues amid growing anger. Teachers remain the lowest paid nationally, working punishing hours while the Allan Labor government has imposed over \$3 billion in hidden cuts. Last week, the AEU's joint primary and secondary state council passed a resolution stating that if pay and workload negotiations fail, they would apply to the Fair Work Commission for a protected action ballot.

The AEU is setting the stage for a repeat of 2021–22, when the union shut down a developing statewide movement. At that time, South Australian teachers were preparing strikes over inadequate COVID measures, NSW

teachers had walked out and Victorian educators delivered strike votes up to 97 percent.

Yet in February 2022, the AEU abruptly signed a sellout agreement with the Victorian Labor government that amounted to a real pay cut—less than 2 percent annually, over the next four years—and provided little to address appalling workloads.

The lesson, confirmed by the current disputes in Tasmania, Queensland and Victoria, is clear: When teachers are diverted into negotiations and arbitration, pay, staffing and safety are sacrificed. Teachers must build new democratic organisations of struggle—rank-and-file committees in every school, uniting educators and support staff across state lines, and advancing demands based on the real needs of teachers, support staff and students, such as:

- An immediate 40 percent wage increase, indexed to inflation, to make up for past losses.
- Maximum class sizes of 15–20.
- A minimum of eight hours of in-school planning time weekly.
- Psychologists employed in every school.
- Hiring thousands of teachers and support staff to end crushing workloads.

What the governments and union bureaucrats fear most is unified action across all states, a struggle that would challenge the capitalist agenda prioritising war preparations, including AUKUS, and corporate infrastructure over public education. The fight for fully funded public education is inseparable from a political struggle against the private profit system defended by both major parties and the trade union apparatus.

For assistance to establish rank-and-file committees, please contact the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the educators' rank-and file network:

**Contact the CFPE:**

Email: [cfpe.aus@gmail.com](mailto:cfpe.aus@gmail.com)

Facebook: [facebook.com/commforpubliceducation](https://facebook.com/commforpubliceducation)

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



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**