

# Australia: Teachers to strike across Tasmania against real wage cuts

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Tasmanian public school teachers will carry out one-day strikes across the state this week, in opposition to a real-wage cutting enterprise agreement offer from the state Liberal government of Premier Jeremy Rockliff that will do nothing to address educators' concerns over workloads, safety and other working conditions.

The industrial action in Tasmania coincides with a statewide strike by Victorian teachers on Tuesday over similar issues, directly posing the need for unified action. But the Australian Education Union (AEU) is doing the opposite—not only isolating Tasmanian educators from those in other states, but from each other. Teachers in northwest Tasmania will strike on Tuesday, while those in the north will stop work on Wednesday and the south on Thursday, in a move calculated by the union bureaucracy to undermine the impact of the action.

This will be the third stoppage by Tasmanian educators since negotiations between the AEU and the state government for a new three-year enterprise agreement covering teachers, school principals, education support staff and school psychologists began last September. In October and December last year, teachers across the state stopped work for half a day.

The latest offer from the Rockliff government is for a nominal pay rise of 8.75 percent in total over three years. This is well below the Consumer Price Index (CPI) which was 3.8 percent in the year to January and is expected to go above 4.5 percent this year, fuelled by the US-Israel war on Iran, meaning the offer would be another significant pay cut.

Moreover, the government insists that this abysmal pay offer, barely higher than the one teachers rejected earlier this month, must be paid for by the working class. According to the AEU, the offer “seeks to include a requirement to discuss public service cuts.”

The log of claims put forward by the AEU calls for caps on classroom sizes, additional support staff, a one-hour

per week cap on after school meetings, time off in lieu for attendance at school camps and statewide measures to combat violence in the schools. The union is seeking a 15.6 percent pay rise over three years and an additional 5.95 percent in September this year, ostensibly to bring Tasmanian teachers closer to the pay of teachers in other states.

The union's meagre claims would do little to address teachers' concerns. The pay demand does not begin to make up for decades of real wage cuts. On workloads, there are almost no concrete measures other than the proposed cap on class sizes.

The proposal to address violence in schools, a key issue for classroom teachers, is for a joint union-government working group on violence, which, even if granted, would do nothing to address the safety concerns of teachers.

In addition to the stoppages last year, teachers in Tasmania have carried out limited work bans, including on participating in the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing, a testing regime that has been central to the restructuring and marketisation of public education.

The response of the Rockliff government was to bring in scabs to run the tests at more than 70 schools across the state.

NAPLAN is a high-stakes standardised testing regime that narrows curriculum, ranks schools, and provides data used to justify cuts, closures and the diversion of resources into private schooling and “edu-business.”

Introduced by the Gillard-Rudd Labor government in 2009, the NAPLAN tests are widely opposed by teachers, parents and students. In 2010, a plan for a nationwide ban on the tests was supported by broad layers of the population but ultimately blocked by AEU officials.

The strikes by Tasmanian teachers this week reflect explosive anger after years of real wage cuts, chronic understaffing, unsustainable workloads and unsafe

classrooms. These conditions are the product of a long-term program of austerity imposed by successive state governments—Labor and Liberal alike—and enforced by the union bureaucracy.

The AEU has at times called stoppages, but the union leadership's modus operandi has been to confine action to token measures, negotiate behind closed doors and accept "affordable" settlements that betray educators' needs. This pattern has been repeated nationally, including Victoria's 2022 and South Australia's 2023 sellout deals, revealing the bureaucracy's function as an instrument of industrial management rather than a vehicle for rank-and-file power.

On Tuesday this week, both Tasmanian and Victorian teachers will be on strike. But the AEU bureaucracy is keeping their struggles entirely separate, from each other, and from those of other public sector workers and the working class more broadly. This includes other AEU-covered workers, such as Victorian early childhood educators, who took strike action several weeks ago and Queensland teachers, who stopped work late last year.

Public education workers in Tasmania, like those in the mainland states, want to fight back against appalling working conditions, crowded and unsafe classrooms and limited preparation time. Decades of cuts have led to a sector that is significantly underfunded and is chronically short-staffed.

But under the leadership of the AEU bureaucracy, this week's strikes will be reduced to exercises in teachers letting off steam, while union and government officials work behind closed doors to cook up a rotten sellout deal.

To avoid this, educators must break out of the bureaucratic straitjacket of the union and take matters into their own hands. The starting point is the formation of democratically elected rank-and-file committees (RFCs) in every school and early childhood centre, led by workers themselves, not highly paid union officials.

These committees should insist on full transparency of all offers, demand immediate publication of government proposals and refuse to accept sellouts negotiated behind closed doors. The 2022 Victorian sellout was enabled by secrecy, censorship and stage-managed meetings.

Through RFCs, educators can fight for demands based on their actual needs, not what governments and unions say is "affordable," while billions of dollars are poured into AUKUS and other war preparations. These demands should include: immediate inflation-indexed wage rises sufficient to restore past losses; enforceable class-size limits; a minimum of eight hours guaranteed in-school

planning time per week; fully funded allied health support in every school; no casualisation and guaranteed year-round employment for support staff.

The struggle for educators' wages and conditions and for a high-quality, fully funded public education system requires a political perspective. Regardless of whether Liberal or Labor are in power, capitalist governments of every ilk are committed to corporate profit over social needs and war. The US-led war against Iran has exposed the entire political establishment in Australia as supporters and active participants of an illegal war which threatens to plunge the world into World War III.

The assault on public education is international. Teachers in the United Kingdom, United States, South Korea and elsewhere are fighting similar battles against austerity and militarisation of curricula. Rank-and-file committees (RFCs) are the organisational bridge that can link these struggles internationally, enabling joint days of action and mutual solidarity and breaking the isolation the union bureaucracies impose. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA?RFC) offers a model for linking struggles across borders.

What teachers in Tasmania, Victoria, across Australia and around the world are up against cannot be overcome within the limits of parliament or the union apparatus. Their fight must be waged as part of a broader struggle against austerity, privatisation and militarism and for the political independence of the working class.

Above all, what is required is a socialist perspective that rejects the subordination of education to the budget dictates of the capitalist market and the war machine.

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)



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