

# Australia: Victorian Labor leaks pay offer while teacher union prepares another sellout

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The Victorian state Labor government of Premier Jacinta Allan has deliberately leaked to the corporate media a supposed offer of a 28 percent wage increase for public school teachers over four years. This calculated manoeuvre aims to test educators' response and impose yet another sub-standard, sell-out enterprise agreement with the complicity of the Australian Education Union (AEU) apparatus.

The reported offer reflects the fears of not only the state government, but the Albanese Labor government federally, that strikes in Victoria could become the starting point of broader action by teachers and others nationally who are under severe financial pressures, now being intensified by the inflationary spiral generated by the criminal US-Israeli war on Iran.

The statewide strike and rally on March 24, involving more than 40,000 teachers and school staff, demonstrated the immense potential for a wider struggle against Labor's program of austerity and war preparations. For the first time in over a decade, educators took strike action, winning significant support among workers and parents, as well as educators nationally, underscoring the importance of educators as a key part of the working class.

No formal proposal has been presented to teachers. No breakdown of annual increases, no disclosure of trade-offs, and no explanation of inevitable "productivity" demands—intensified workloads and deteriorating conditions—have been released. Instead, the figure has been floated through the media as a fait accompli.

By circulating an inflated headline number, the Allan government is assessing the AEU's capacity to enforce a deal, while desperately trying to turn public opinion against the teachers. The aim is to create the illusion of a generous pay rise, isolating educators from other workers. Media headlines proclaim a "whopping 28 percent" increase, obscuring the reality that every section of the working class is experiencing an escalating cost-of-living crisis on top of a decade-long cut to real wages.

The media leak says nothing about the core issues raised by teachers: crushing workloads, oversized classes, burnout, inadequate resources and a deepening staffing crisis as educators leave the profession in growing numbers.

This is not merely a negotiating tactic but political manipulation under conditions of economic and political crisis. Facing rising debt and fiscal pressures, the Labor governments and their trade union partners are acutely aware of growing anger among workers confronting escalating mortgage stress, rents and soaring costs for food, fuel and essential services.

These pressures are being deepened by escalating global conflict, spearheaded by the illegal and expanding US-Israel wars in the Middle East, as the Trump administration prepares further conflicts, particularly against China, with the Albanese government fully aligned.

The 28 percent claim is a fraud. Spread over four years, it amounts to annual increases of around 7 percent—well below what is required amid sharply rising living costs. Inflation, officially 4.6 percent in March, is projected to reach around 6 percent by June. That does not even count the

Reserve Bank rate hikes that continue to drive up mortgages and rents, leaving households hundreds of dollars worse off each week.

Since 2021, teachers have already suffered real wage cuts of around 10 percent, thanks to the last AEU sellout deal in 2022. The government's purported offer does nothing to recover these losses or address worsening conditions.

To try to divide educators from each other, the government deal for Education Support (ES) staff is 13 percent over four years. This is another massive wage cut for ES staff who mainly work part-time, already living off poverty-level wages and working in terrible conditions.

As of May 2, the AEU has issued no formal statement confirming or rejecting the leaked offer. Its silence is not an oversight but a political act. Despite widespread confusion, the union has made no effort to clarify the proposal, expose its fraudulent character or mobilise teachers. Instead, it has remained silent while negotiations continue behind closed doors. Members received only brief, evasive emails on April 29 and 30 stating: "No pay offer, despite media reports—negotiations are continuing" and "There is no new offer as negotiations continue."

No substantive information is being provided about what is being discussed or conceded. This silence is a warning.

The AEU apparatus has tried to contain growing militancy among educators. Even before the powerful March 24 strike, the AEU bureaucracy passed a resolution at a primary and secondary state council on March 20 to dissipate this momentum, funnelling it into limited half-day regional half-day stoppages and ineffectual bans.

Rather than extending and unifying the struggle, the AEU restricted industrial action and moved back into negotiations. The aim is to prevent the emergence of an independent movement of educators outside union control. This was evident in the absence of any call to unify with striking teachers in Tasmania or early childhood educators in Victoria.

The current situation continues this process. The government tests the waters through media leaks, the union remains silent, and both prepare to present a rotten deal the AEU officials believe can be imposed.

## Teachers voice hostility

Educators' response, in opposition to the AEU, has been immediate, widespread and hostile. Across social media, union meetings and informal discussions, teachers are rejecting the 28 percent proposal and warning against another union sellout.

On Facebook and Reddit, teachers posted comments such as: "28% over 4 years—what's your salary going to look like in 4 years' time? Look at your salary now, that was average in 2022 and now is just appalling... Also, what about our working conditions? School funding? Miserable ES pay offer? No no no."

“28% is a joke, and a VERY calculated maneuver[sic] by the gov. I’d vote no on this instantly.”

“Conditions and pay matter—without both I am not remaining in the job. This year has only just started and already everyone is done. It’s never been like this. Burnout is truly amongst us and hitting people. I expect if an agreement that isn’t fair for both happens, we lose 2-3k teachers immediately. Many are on the fence waiting to resign.”

“28% sounds good in headlines, but 7% a year without an inflation core clause, in the middle of a cost of living crisis is a \*\*\*\*\*. We’re already dealing with escalating workloads, increasingly difficult student behaviour, staff shortages and countless unpaid hours.”

“Garbage. Don’t fall for it. 28% over four years would STILL leave us chasing our tails. We need to salvage teacher wages from their steep regression.”

One comment recalled the AEU’s sellout on the last agreement in 2022: “Part of the reason the \*\*\*\* deal got accepted previously was the AEU turning off comments and blocking anyone who dared question the \*\*\*\*\* deal on their social pages and pushing vote yes propaganda to everyone.”

An ES worker posted: “As an ES of 10 years, I’ll be saying a big fat NO if we don’t get the same rise. Absolutely discriminating!”

These sentiments reflect a growing opposition and an emerging political consciousness. Educators are not simply reacting to a number, they are starting to draw conclusions from decades of agreements between Labor and the unions that have delivered declining real wages, escalating workloads and worsening conditions.

The crucial issue is how to take this struggle forward.

### **For a unified movement against austerity and war**

Across Australia, Labor governments—federal and state—are enforcing austerity while overseeing a vast transfer of wealth to corporations and the financial elite. Billions are directed to military expansion, profit-driven infrastructure, subsidies to big business and elite private schools, while essential services such as public education remain chronically underfunded. This is part of a broader national and international offensive against the working class.

Cuts to the National Disability Insurance Scheme are a stark example. Support for the most vulnerable is being slashed, with the Albanese government announcing a \$35 billion reduction over four years—one of the largest cuts to a social program in Australian history—alongside a further \$53 billion increase in military spending over the next decade. These priorities reflect a political establishment preparing for escalating global conflict and economic instability.

At the state level, the Allan Labor government faces pressure from credit rating agencies such as Moody’s and S&P Global to impose “fiscal discipline” amid soaring debt projected to reach \$236.6 billion by 2029. The government announced in December that more than 1,000 jobs will be slashed across the public service.

The same Labor government is pursuing public housing demolition, has introduced laws allowing children as young as 14 to be tried in adult courts and rolled out new police powers to suppress public protests, including over the Gaza genocide.

Governments and union bureaucrats are acutely aware of the danger of a broader eruption of working-class struggle outside their control. The last thing they want is a unified movement of educators, health workers and other public sector workers demanding real improvements.

Providing essential political cover for the AEU leadership are pseudo-left organisations—including Socialist Alternative and Victorian

Socialists—operating under the banner of “Socialists in Schools.” These organisations downplay the broader political and economic context—of war and the global crisis of capitalism—promoting the illusion that more one-day strikes, appeals to union leaders or pressure campaigns can force governments to reverse course.

Posing as militant critics, they reduce the crisis to weak leadership or insufficient strike action, obscuring the real issue: the unions have become instruments for enforcing wage cuts, rising workloads and austerity. They are attempting to tie teachers to the same organisations blocking a genuine fight.

Struggles controlled by the union apparatuses lead to the same outcome: closed-door negotiations and agreements that enforce the dictates of the financial markets and their political servants. What is required is a fundamental break—a different strategy.

The Committee for Public Education (CFPE) calls on teachers to reject any agreement based on the government’s fraudulent 28 percent proposal. Any wage claim must catch up for past losses and be fully indexed to the real cost of living. Educators must insist on full transparency—complete publication of all terms, including trade-offs and conditions with no suppression and censorship of opposing voices. Above all, teachers must take the struggle out of the hands of the union bureaucracy.

We urge educators to establish rank-and-file committees in every school, democratically controlled by educators themselves, to organise opposition, share information and develop a unified campaign. These committees must involve parents and students, and ES staff, who face similarly intolerable conditions and low pay, and reach out to kindergarten educators, many working under even more precarious conditions.

The issues confronting teachers are shared across the public sector. Health workers, transport workers, public servants and others face the same underlying assault on jobs, wages and conditions. Through rank-and-file committees, educators can appeal for support to the broadest layers of the working class.

The fight is not simply for a better enterprise agreement but a political struggle against austerity and war-driven attacks on public education and essential services. Teachers must oppose the diversion of resources into military spending and corporate profit and demand society’s wealth be used to fund high-quality public education, decent wages and proper working conditions.

Growing opposition is an important development, but it must become a conscious, organised movement independent of Labor and the union apparatus, fighting for a socialist society based on need, not profit. If the present course continues, the outcome will be another sellout. The time has come for a unified struggle—across schools, sectors and the working class as a whole—against the austerity and war agenda imposed by governments and enforced by the union bureaucracy.

Teachers who would like further discussion on this perspective should contact and join the CFPE to form rank-and-file committees in their schools, and help link up their fight with educators and workers across Australia and internationally through the International Workers Alliance for Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

#### **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)

Facebook: [facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout](https://facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout)



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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