

Australian Education Union cancels strikes in Victoria to impose Labor's austerity agenda

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The Australian Education Union (AEU) has taken a major step toward completely selling out the struggle by public school educators in Victoria against their low pay and intolerable conditions, by calling off even the limited regional half-day stoppages scheduled over the next two weeks.

The AEU Victorian state executive's decision, made behind the backs of teachers and Education Support staff, was announced in an early morning email on Monday signed by AEU deputy president Briley Stokes and president Justin Mullaly.

The decision was driven by fears that the dispute, backed by teachers nationally, along with parents and broader sections of the working class, after a powerful one-day statewide strike on March 24, could escape trade union control and develop into a wider movement, posing a political crisis for both the state and federal Labor governments.

The stoppages were cancelled just as Melbourne local council workers, public health workers in Victoria and educators in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) were all due to take action.

The AEU email said the stoppages had been "suspended" to "enable the continuation of intensive negotiations over the next two weeks to maximise the best chance for an in-principle agreement to be reached."

After previously denying that Premier Jacinta Allan's Labor government had made any new offer to end the industrial action, the AEU leaders revealed that they had been engaged in three full days of backroom talks with the government on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, after the government leaked to the media a proposal for a supposed 28 percent pay rise over four years.

The AEU rushed into secret negotiations in the face of public opposition from educators to news of the offer, which was far less than the AEU's nominal claim for 35 percent over three years, and, as the Committee for Public Education (CFPE) and the *World Socialist Web Site* warned, "said 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."

Many social media posts after the government leak had indicated growing anger among educators. A typical one stated: "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."

The cancellation of strike action underscores the warnings made by the CFPE and the WSWs in a series of recent articles that the AEU apparatus was working with the Victorian Labor government to

prepare another sellout agreement.

In our April 29 article, "Australian Education Union divides teachers to prepare sellout in Victoria—build rank-and-file committees," we warned that the AEU was deliberately fragmenting and limiting industrial action in order to prevent the emergence of a unified struggle.

Our May 2 article, "Australia: Victorian Labor leaks pay offer while teacher union prepares another sellout," explained that the government's leak was "a calculated manoeuvre:"

"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."

The CFPE also exposed the AEU's deliberate silence, noting that its failure to clarify or oppose the offer was "not an oversight but a political act," warning that "no substantive information is being provided about what is being discussed or conceded."

As the CFPE documented, the AEU bureaucrats had already acted before the March 24 strike, passing a March 20 resolution to divert rising militancy into half-day regional stoppages and ineffectual bans.

In response to the cancellation of the stoppages, teachers again took to social media and moved resolutions in union branches condemning the decision. The AEU removed numerous critical comments posted on its Facebook pages—continuing a pattern of censorship and anti-democratic methods.

Since the powerful March 24 strike, economic pressures on educators have only intensified, driving governments and the AEU to fast-track a sellout agreement. Inflation is accelerating—officially 4.6 percent in the 12 months to March and rising—and the Reserve Bank of Australia yesterday lifted interest rates from 4.1 to 4.35 percent, further deepening the cost-of-living crisis. Mortgage repayments, along with soaring food and fuel prices, are eroding teachers' real incomes.

Broader working-class opposition

All workers are facing this crisis, intensified by the US-Israeli wars in the Middle East and preparations for wider conflicts, including against China—fully backed by the Albanese government. The Labor governments and the union apparatus are seeking to prevent the emergence of a working-class movement against austerity, wage

suppression and war.

At the very moment the AEU moved to shut down strike action by teachers, other workers are entering struggle.

Yesterday more than 1,000 workers covered by the Australian Services Union took 24-hour strike action across eight Melbourne municipal councils. Joined by many supporters, they marched to the state parliament, demanding a 22 percent pay rise over four years and improved conditions. This action, described as the largest council workers' strike in Australian history, followed earlier bans on bin collection and parking enforcement.

Medical scientists, psychologists and pharmacists covered by the Health Services Union have escalated industrial action through work-to-rule measures, refusing unpaid overtime after more than a year of stalled negotiations. Early childhood educators have also taken action over wages and conditions, while public school nurses, covered by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, have begun bans to fight for fair pay and safe workloads.

This movement extends beyond Victoria. Educators in Canberra have endorsed strike action against the Greens-backed Labor government in the ACT and public sector workers there are currently voting on industrial action as well.

In yesterday's state budget, the Allan government produced a \$700 million operating surplus for 2025–26 in a bid to satisfy the financial markets and the corporate elite.

The nominal \$19 billion education allocation leaves public schools the lowest funded in Australia. The burden on teachers will increase with the extra load of thousands of students removed by the Albanese government from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) under the so-called Thriving Kids and Foundational Supports scheme, for which the Allan government has allocated just \$2.4 billion over four years.

Per-student recurrent funding—covering staff salaries and daily classroom costs—continues to decline in real terms, especially with inflation sky-rocketing. Moreover, even based on the inadequate official Gonski funding model, a \$2.4 billion shortfall over six years remains because the state Labor government delayed full commitments under that scheme until 2031.

Providing political cover for the AEU are pseudo-left groups, including Socialist Alternative and Victorian Socialists, operating under the banner of Socialists in Schools. They obscure the wider context of war and capitalism's deepening crisis, promoting the illusion that strikes, appeals to union officials or pressure campaigns can compel governments and unions to reverse course.

Amid signs of a potential rebellion by teachers against the sellout move, they are seeking to keep educators from breaking out of the AEU straitjacket.

While posturing as critics, the pseudo-lefts reduce the dispute to questions of tactics, obscuring the central issue: The unions have become instruments to suppress opposition while enforcing wage cuts, rising workloads and austerity. They blame the previous disastrous 2022 sellout on weak leadership and insufficient strike action, while concealing the decisive role of the union bureaucracy in enforcing censorship, spreading misinformation and shielding the Labor governments.

Experiences in Australia and internationally demonstrate that disputes kept under union control end in closed-door deals enforcing government and financial market dictates. An assessment of this record requires a decisive break toward a fundamentally different political and organisational strategy.

As the AEU moves to impose a betrayal, educators must prepare their own response, including organised opposition to the deal being readied. Teachers have shown willingness to fight, but this poses decisive questions: Who controls the struggle, and how can it be advanced independently of the apparatus that has repeatedly blocked it?

At its core, this is a struggle against the Labor governments and the union structures that uphold their program, which includes pouring hundreds of billions of dollars into AUKUS and other preparations for war.

The CFPE calls on teachers to reject any agreement based on the government's fraudulent 28 percent offer. Any claim must recoup years of real wage losses and be fully indexed to the actual cost of living. Educators should demand complete transparency—full publication of all terms, trade-offs and conditions—and an end to suppression of dissent. Above all, the struggle must be taken out of the AEU bureaucracy's hands.

Teachers should establish rank-and-file committees in every school, democratically run by educators themselves, to coordinate opposition, circulate information and organise a unified campaign. These committees should link with parents, students and education support staff, as well as early childhood educators facing even more precarious conditions.

The issues confronting teachers are shared across the public sector, where workers face the same underlying assault on wages, jobs and conditions. Through independent committees, educators can connect their fight with health workers and others, laying the basis for a broader working-class response.

This is not simply a dispute over an enterprise agreement, but a political struggle against austerity and the diversion of resources into militarism, the elite private schools and corporate profit. Public education, wages and working conditions can be advanced only through a unified movement of the working class, independent of Labor and the union apparatus, based on a genuine socialist program to meet social need, not capitalist profit.

Teachers who would like further discussion on this perspective should contact the CFPE to form rank-and-file committees in their schools to 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

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

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

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout



To contact the WWSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact