

Australia: Victorian teachers confront another AEU sellout

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Public school teachers and Education Support (ES) workers across the Australian state of Victoria are facing the need to fight yet another sellout deal between the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the state Labor government—one that deepens the impact of the last such AEU agreement in 2022.

The AEU’s “in-principle” agreement, pushed through the union’s primary and secondary state council last Friday, amounts to a further real pay cut, on top of the effective 10 percent cut since 2021. It does nothing to address the core issues raised by educators: crushing workloads, oversized classes, burnout, inadequate resources and a deepening staffing crisis as teachers leave the profession in growing numbers.

Earlier, the AEU bureaucrats had rushed into backroom talks with the government, driven by fears that an ongoing 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 their control and develop into a wider movement over the cost-of-living crisis and social spending cuts, threatening both the Allan state government and the Albanese Labor government.

The AEU had cancelled even its proposed half-day regional stoppages 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, and just as the state and federal Labor governments were about to hand down budgets that continued to cut public school funding in real terms.

In announcing the deal last Friday, AEU president Justin Mullally, Premier Jacinta Allan’s government and the corporate media promoted the headline figure of a supposed wage increase of 28.3 to 32.4 percent over four years. Typical was the Melbourne *Age* headline: “Best paid in the country—Teacher deal to push wages above \$150,000.”

This is a fraud, designed to cause maximum confusion before teachers and ES staff were even informed of the deal, let alone had a chance to examine any of its details.

An average increase of 29.7 percent compounded over four years equates to roughly 6.7 to 7 percent annually. This is under conditions of officially recorded inflation of 4.6 percent in the 12 months to March 2026 and projected to approach 6 percent by mid-year.

That does not even count the impact of the Reserve Bank continuing to lift interest rates, with the most recent increase from 4.1 to 4.35 percent driving mortgage repayments, rents and

essential costs higher. The escalating criminal US-Israeli war on Iran—with the Albanese government’s full complicity—has intensified inflation in energy and commodity prices, further eroding wages.

There is no inflation-indexing clause, no cost-of-living adjustment, in the AEU’s proposed four-year deal. Educators would be locked into fixed increases while living costs surge. That would be after the 2022 sellout imposed nominal pay rises of just 2 percent annually—far below the inflation rate.

The new agreement would not only fail to recover those losses; it would entrench them for four more years.

For ES staff, who provide much-needed educational support for special needs students, the situation would be even worse. The agreement’s structure—with 12.5 percent in the first six months, partly composed of a one-off 7.4 percent “allowance” rather than a permanent base increase—obscures that ongoing rises remain below those for teachers. ES workers, mostly part-time and already on poverty-level wages, are being offered an allowance recognising their “professional responsibilities and student duty of care, including during lunch breaks.”

This is an insult that maintains their appalling conditions, once again dividing education staff. Instead of funding ES positions, staffing classrooms or addressing workload, the government and the AEU are proposing a supplementary allowance as a substitute for fundamental change.

On working conditions, the AEU claims “workload wins,” but none withstand scrutiny. There is no class-size cap—the most fundamental driver of burnout and poor student outcomes.

There is no cap on administrative burdens or curriculum changes. The “requirement for the department to consult the AEU” on curriculum changes would provide no protection. Meeting participation requirements would remain unchanged. There would be no guaranteed minimum weekly planning time.

Student-free days would increase to eight a year, but this would do nothing to address unpaid overtime, marking, reporting or overcrowded classrooms. There is no commitment to hire thousands of additional teachers or ES staff, no funded plan to address the staffing crisis.

OECD data show Australian teachers working 46.5 hours weekly, well above the OECD norm, with two-thirds reporting high stress and more than 80 percent saying their work harms their mental health. None of this is addressed.

The agreement’s workload provisions are phrased in the

agreement as “consultation” and “consideration”—without enforceable limits or resources. They would leave unsustainable daily school realities untouched.

Under the four-year agreement expiring May 15, 2030, educators would be stripped of the right to take protected industrial action until the end of the decade.

According to enterprise bargaining laws imposed by the Keating Labor government and the trade unions in the 1990s, workers can only strike legally for improved wages and conditions during bargaining periods. A four-year agreement would mean four years bound hand and feet. This is the central aim of the government and the AEU: to remove the weapon of strike action as conditions worsen.

Educators who voted 98 percent for industrial action are being asked to accept another four-year straitjacket in exchange for below-inflation pay rises and intolerable conditions.

Anti-democratic process

For months the Committee for Public Education (CFPE) and the *World Socialist Web Site* have warned that the AEU apparatus was preparing to betray Victorian educators, just as it did in 2022 and for decades before that. That betrayal has now taken form in the “in-principle agreement” that the AEU bureaucrats are attempting to ram through via a thoroughly anti-democratic process. Even before any vote has been taken, all industrial action has been lifted.

The AEU’s ratification process is even more anti-democratic than the one used in 2022, which revealed at least a 40 percent vote against the sellout. The system is designed from top to bottom to deliver a yes vote.

This is not a one-member-one-vote ballot. Individual union members’ votes are not counted. Instead, a single delegate, defaulting automatically to whoever appears as sub-branch president in the AEU’s own database, casts votes on behalf of every 20 financial members after a sub-branch meeting. What constitutes a valid sub-branch decision is not outlined.

The AEU controls that database. The AEU runs the online voting platform. The AEU collects the results and announces the outcome. The question of who counts the vote is not a secondary issue—it is a question of workers’ democratic rights.

At every point in the process, the AEU determines the outcome. There is no independent auditor, no rank-and-file scrutineers, and no mechanism for members to verify that their sub-branch’s votes were recorded accurately or that the aggregate count is honest.

As it did in 2022, the AEU has already demonstrated that it will suppress democratic dissent when its agenda is threatened—removing critical comments from its Facebook pages, issuing evasive emails denying any government offer while secretly negotiating, and cancelling strikes by early morning emails with no member consultation. This is the same apparatus counting the votes!

The deal must be rejected with the largest possible no vote, and independent rank-and-file committees formed, to place control in

the hands of educators themselves, not the trade union apparatus, linking the struggle with broader sections of the working class confronting Labor’s program of austerity and war.

The Allan Labor government is boasting a \$700 million budget surplus to satisfy the financial markets while leaving public schools severely underfunded. State debt, projected to reach \$236.6 billion by 2029, is cited by ratings agencies as grounds for “fiscal discipline,” meaning educators must bear the cost.

Federally, the Albanese government has committed an additional \$53 billion to military spending through AUKUS and announced a \$35 billion cut to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)—the largest cut to a social program in Australian history.

Thousands of students currently supported through the NDIS are being shifted to state responsibility. This will increase teacher and ES workloads precisely as the agreement would lock in conditions for four years.

The CFPE calls on all educators to vote NO at any sub-branch meetings. A no vote rejects not only inadequate wages and conditions but the entire process of secret negotiations, censorship and AEU control.

A no vote must assert that educators will take matters into their own hands, away from an apparatus that controls information, meetings, social media and the legal framework. A no vote must be paired with independent organisation.

Rank-and-file committees must be built in every school, democratically controlled by educators. They must organise opposition, share information, demand full transparency, connect across schools, advance demands based on real needs—indexed wages, recovery of the 10 percent lost since 2021, class sizes of 15–20, eight hours of planning time, full staffing, enforceable workload limits and no no-strike clause.

They must build solidarity with early childhood educators, health workers and other public sector workers, and link with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to connect this struggle internationally.

This is not merely an enterprise agreement dispute. It is a political struggle against Labor governments and a union apparatus enforcing the priorities of the capitalist state: austerity for workers, billions for war.

The CFPE fights for a socialist program—the reorganisation of society’s resources to meet human need, including a fully funded, world-class public education system for every child.

Teachers who would like further discussion on this perspective should 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



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