

Vote No to the Australian Education Union/Labor sell-out deal! Build independent rank-and-file committees in every school!

Committee for Public Education

25 May 2026

Public school teachers, Education Support (ES) workers and principals in the Australian state of Victoria are being asked to ratify a retrograde four-year in-principle agreement negotiated in secret between the Australian Education Union (AEU) bureaucracy and Premier Jacinta Allan's state Labor government.

The deal amounts to a further real pay cut, does nothing to address crushing workloads or class sizes, and strips educators of the right to strike until 2030. Fully aware of intense opposition, the AEU apparatus is attempting to push it through via a transparently anti-democratic process.

The Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file network, therefore calls on educators to vote an overwhelming "No!" and build independent rank-and-file committees in every school to fight this sellout.

The real content of the AEU agreement

The AEU and the corporate media have promoted a headline pay rise figure of 28.3 to 32.4 percent over four years as though it were a great win. This is a fraud. An average compounded increase of 29.7 percent over four years amounts to roughly 6.7 to 7 percent annually. But officially recorded inflation already hit 4.6 percent in the 12 months to March 2026, and is projected to approach 6 percent by mid-year, and rise further under the pressure of the criminal US-Israeli war on Iran and its impact fuel, food and other prices.

There is no inflation-indexing clause, no cost-of-living adjustment. Educators would be locked into fixed increases while living costs surge, after the AEU's 2022 sellout has already imposed nominal rises of less than 2 percent annually, amounting to an effective 10 percent real pay cut since 2021. This deal entrenches those losses for nearly five more years, from the last pay rise in July 2025 until May 2030.

For ES workers, among the most underpaid and overworked members of the school community—many holding second jobs simply to survive—the agreement is an outright attack. The headline first-year figure includes a 7.4 percent one-off "allowance" rather than a permanent base increase, meaning ongoing rises remain below those of teachers. The AEU offers an allowance to recognise ES workers' "professional responsibilities and student duty of care, including during lunch breaks." This is not recognition but an insult, maintaining poverty-level wages and dividing education staff rather than unifying them in a common struggle.

On working conditions, the claims made by the AEU collapse under any scrutiny. There is no cap on class sizes, one of the most fundamental drivers of burnout, stress and student outcomes. There is no cap on administrative burdens. There is no guaranteed minimum weekly planning

time. Provisions on curriculum change and meeting requirements are expressed as promises to "consult" or "consider"—unenforceable language that would leave classroom realities untouched.

The extra student-free days do nothing to address unpaid overtime, marking loads or overcrowded classrooms. Thousands of additional teachers and ES staff are not funded; the staffing crisis is not addressed. According to OECD data, Australian teachers already work an average of 46.5 hours per week—well above the international norm—with two-thirds reporting high stress and more than 80 percent saying their work harms their mental health. None of this would change under this agreement.

Most critically, this is a four-year no-strike agreement. Under enterprise bargaining laws introduced by the Keating Labor government and enforced by the trade unions, workers can take protected industrial action only during bargaining periods. By ratifying a deal running until May 2030, educators would effectively surrender the right to strike for the rest of the decade.

Educators who voted 98 percent for industrial action are now being told to give up that weapon in exchange for below-inflation pay rises and intolerable conditions. This is the central aim of both the government and its partners in the AEU bureaucracy: to shut down collective action as conditions worsen and broader layers of workers enter into struggle.

Anti-democratic ratification process

This deal is being imposed on educators through a deeply anti-democratic process designed to secure the outcome the bureaucracy wants—a Yes vote. Aware of anger among educators, the AEU has deliberately structured the process to suppress opposition.

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—would cast votes on behalf of every 20 financial members following a sub-branch meeting. The AEU controls that database. The AEU announces the results. There are no rank-and-file scrutineers. There is no mechanism for members to verify that their sub-branch's votes were recorded accurately, or that the aggregate count is honest.

This is not a secondary concern but a question of workers' democratic rights. The same AEU apparatus has spent months removing critical comments from its Facebook pages and sending evasive emails denying any government offer, while secretly negotiating and cancelling strikes via early morning emails with no member consultation.

At last week's online "information" meetings, union bureaucrats

dominated proceedings to promote the deal. The meetings were tightly controlled: the normal chat function was disabled, participants could only submit isolated questions, and educators could not see each other's comments. In one meeting, just a single question was taken before the session was abruptly shut down.

Equally undemocratically, the AEU abandoned even its limited half-day regional stoppages just as Melbourne municipal council workers, public health workers and ACT educators were preparing industrial action, and as state and federal Labor budgets intensified cuts to public education.

All industrial action was called off not because a better deal was imminent, but because the bureaucracy feared the movement was slipping from its control. When thousands of teachers marched on March 24 determined to fight, and won widespread support from parents and throughout the working class as a whole, the union had already decided four days earlier to scale back action to half-day stoppages and ineffectual bans.

In 2022, an anti-democratic ratification process produced a 40 percent vote against the sellout despite every obstacle placed before dissenting members. That opposition was a powerful expression of the anger that burns through the profession. The current process is even more restrictive.

Labor's education cuts

The latest deal is not an isolated industrial agreement but one front of an offensive by federal and state governments against the entire working class.

The Albanese government's federal budget, handed down on May 12, contains \$63.8 billion in further cuts to social spending over the next four years. For public schools:

- Student Engagement and Wellbeing funding has been slashed from \$4 billion to \$1 billion for 2026–27, gutting programs that allowed some schools to hire psychologists, mental health counsellors and support staff for at-risk students.

- Disability funding within the Education Department has been cut by \$417 million over four years, directly attacking the capacity of public schools to support students with disabilities, behavioural disorders and developmental conditions.

- The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan—the government's own supposed answer to the staffing crisis—has been cut from \$48 million to just \$17.6 million by 2029–30.

- Federal funding for public schools will grow by just 4.1 percent in 2026–27, well below inflation, while funding for private and religious schools is set to grow by 19.3 percent over the next four years.

Most devastating of all is Labor's gutting of the National Disability Insurance Scheme—the largest cut to a social program in Australian history, totalling \$35 billion. Tens of thousands of students receiving NDIS-funded support will be pushed onto already underfunded state systems. Public schools, which educate the majority of students with disabilities, including more than 200,000 assessed as disabled, will face an avalanche of unmet need. Teachers and ES workers, already stretched beyond breaking point, will carry the burden.

Meanwhile, the Allan government is boasting of a \$700 million budget surplus to satisfy the financial markets. Projected state debt of \$236.6 billion by 2029 is being used to justify “fiscal discipline”—meaning educators and students must pay for the government's obligations to finance capital. This is the same government that quietly sidelined \$2.4 billion earmarked for public education.

The federal budget committed an additional \$53 billion to military spending through AUKUS in preparation for war against China. Albanese

was among the first world leaders to back the criminal US-Israeli assault on Iran, alongside Labor's complicity in the genocide against the Palestinian people.

The federal and state Labor governments, together with the AEU, are demanding educators accept more real pay cuts and sign away the right to strike while pouring billions into war, delivering budget surpluses for the financial markets and gutting disability funding for the most vulnerable.

The role of the fake lefts

Growing opposition to this sellout exists in schools, across social media in Facebook groups, in angry regional and sub-branch meetings. But organisations like “Socialists in Schools” organised by Socialist Alternative are seeking to keep this opposition trapped within the union structure. They insist that the union bureaucracy can be pressured to change course and become more militant.

This perspective has been tested and has failed—not once, but across decades of AEU sellouts. The union bureaucracy does not betray workers out of timidity or poor judgment. It is structurally integrated into the state apparatus and politically tied to the Labor governments. Top AEU officials are on salaries of around a quarter of a million dollars per year—more than double the average teacher's wage. They have a material stake in the system they administer.

Calls to “democratise the union” or pressure Labor to “listen” serve to trap educators within a straitjacket designed precisely to prevent independent action that poses a genuine political challenge. Real opposition cannot be built within these structures. It requires breaking from them.

Vote no, build rank-and-file committees

The CFPE calls for a no vote at every sub-branch meeting. A no vote is not merely a rejection of inadequate wages and conditions, it is a rejection of the entire process: of secret negotiations, of censorship, of the AEU's claim to speak for educators while silencing oppositional voices.

But a no vote alone is not sufficient. It must be paired with independent organisation. The CFPE calls on educators in every school to begin building rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by teachers and ES workers themselves, independent of the AEU apparatus. These committees must:

- Share information across schools, breaking through the censorship the AEU imposes on its social media platforms

- Demand a genuine one-member, one-vote vote, full transparency, independent rank-and-file scrutiny of the results

- Develop demands based on real needs, not what the government and AEU decide is affordable

- Build active solidarity with council workers, health workers, early childhood educators and all sections of the working class currently under attack by Labor's austerity agenda

- Link with rank-and-file workers' committees nationally and internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees

The demands that the CFPE advanced at the opening of the school year are made more urgent by the conditions of this agreement:

- An immediate 40 percent pay increase to recover losses since 2021, with all wages indexed to inflation and automatic cost-of-living

adjustments—no fixed-term deals that lock in real pay cuts

- Maximum class sizes of 15–20—enforced by contract, not “consultations”

- A minimum of 8 hours per week of guaranteed planning, assessment and collaboration time during school hours

- Hire thousands of teachers and ES staff—fully funded positions, not one-off allowances, with at least one full-time ES worker per class

- Employ hundreds of health professionals and psychologists—fully funded support services for every student with disability, complex needs or mental health challenges.

- No four-year no-strike clause—the right to take industrial action must never be signed away

- No public funds for elite private schools—billions for fully-resourced public schools in every community

- Oppose the victimisation of educators, the militarisation of education and the diversion of resources to war.

The fight for decent wages and conditions in public schools is inseparable from the broader political struggle against Labor’s program of austerity and war.

This is not a Labor government that has lost its way or needs to be pressured. It is a government that has made its class priorities clear.

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. That requires the political independence of the working class from all parties and institutions of the capitalist class, including the trade union bureaucracies that enforce its dictates.

Vote NO. Build rank-and-file committees.

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 WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact