

# Victorian teachers oppose Australian Education Union/Labor deal on wages and conditions

Our reporters  
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Educators across the Australian state of Victoria are speaking out against the latest sellout agreement pushed by the Australian Education Union (AEU) and Premier Jacinta Allan’s state Labor government.

Teachers and Education Support staff interviewed by the Committee for Education (CFPE) have explained how the deal does nothing to address the deepening cost-of-living crisis, while offering no meaningful measures on workload, class sizes, staffing shortages or escalating administrative demands.

Not only does the headline pay rise figure of 28.3 to 32.4 percent over four years—and even less for Education Support workers—not cover the projected rise in inflation, under the pressure of the criminal US-Israeli war on Iran, or make up for the effective 10 percent real pay cut since the last AEU sellout in 2022. It would bar any industrial action to fight these conditions for the next four years.

After years of mounting anger over worsening conditions and real pay cuts, and a 98 percent vote for industrial action, many educators view the agreement as another betrayal, aimed at shutting down opposition and locking workers into deteriorating conditions for at least the next four years.

The CFPE, the rank-and-file educators’ network, is calling for a no vote and for the building of independent rank-and-file committees in every school to defeat the agreement, develop demands based on real needs, not what the government and AEU decide is affordable, and unite with other sections of workers in struggle against the Labor government.

**Lily**, a primary school teacher with more than 25 years’ experience, described the proposed AEU agreement as “a sellout” that fails to address the workload crisis confronting educators.

“Teachers are really struggling with workload and this deal does absolutely nothing to make that better,” she said. “Over the life of this four-year agreement, workload is only going to get worse, just like it has over the previous four agreements.

“Face-to-face teaching is exactly the same. Class sizes are the same, but they’re set to rise anyway because of cuts to spending. The student cohort in public schools has more and more complex needs and less and less support.”

Lily said the Albanese federal Labor government’s gutting of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was “going to have a huge impact on workload.” She also stressed the enormous

pressure placed on Education Support (ES) staff and classroom teachers through the Disability Inclusion funding model.

“The absolute hoops people have to jump through to get minimal amounts of money to support students with special needs is a massive workload,” she said. “You can’t even start applying until you’ve done 10 or 12 weeks of evidence gathering and all this documentation. It’s a huge workload for ES staff, classroom teachers—everyone.”

Lily noted that some schools gave the job to manage Disability Inclusion applications solely to assistant principals, underscoring how much work the system now demands. “I don’t know how ES staff do it on their salary,” she said. “The department has always relied on people’s passion for what they do, and the fact that we essentially do this work for free.”

Lily said the agreement’s supposed gains on pay were deeply misleading. “The headlines are all saying this is a massive win and we’ll be the best-paid teachers, but that’s not even true until the end of 2030. At best, it’s only keeping up with inflation, and with inflation rising, mortgages, cost of living, it’s still going to be a real pay cut.”

She criticised the anti-democratic character of the AEU voting process and the suppression of opposition from teachers.

“The process of the vote is telling in itself. There’s no scrutiny, no transparency. There are no mass meetings, no genuine forum where teachers can raise concerns. On AEU Facebook, comments are being removed and people blocked for asking simple questions. We’re paying members and the union is keeping us in the dark and suppressing opposition. They did the same thing during the course of the 2022 sellout, but this is even worse.”

Lily said teachers raising legitimate criticisms were routinely silenced by union officials. “I see myself as fairly mild-mannered, but when I’ve raised questions at sub-branch meetings with union organisers, I’ve been completely shut down. I’ve got legitimate questions they don’t want to hear. There are a lot more questions from teachers this time, especially on sites the AEU can’t control. I think that’s a testament to just how terrible this deal really is.”

**Kristy**, a primary school teacher in the western suburbs of Melbourne, said the proposed AEU agreement was being falsely promoted by the union and media as a major victory.

“On the surface the pay offer looks enticing, and I think it’s designed to be an enticement,” she said. “But when you dig

deeper, over four years it's nowhere near what was originally asked for, and the workload conditions haven't changed at all."

Kristy explained that teachers were already overwhelmed by meetings, administrative demands and growing complexity in classrooms, despite previous promises from the union that workload would improve.

"When we got the reduction in face-to-face time last agreement, my school just added another meeting during the school day. So instead of getting time to do planning, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or organise lessons, we sit in minuted meetings talking about plans someone else has already made. I found out yesterday afternoon I suddenly have to complete an IEP for Monday because a student who didn't need one at the start of the year now apparently does. That's the reality of the workload."

With her partner studying at university, Kristy said her household was surviving week to week despite a teacher's salary. "Our mortgage is about \$660 a week and it's going up again. We've already cut as much as we can. We're looking at cheaper phone and internet plans, shopping around for groceries and fuel, trying to save wherever possible."

She said the US-led war against Iran, backed by the Albanese government, was already worsening the cost-of-living crisis. "We always seem to get dragged into America's wars, even though ordinary people don't want it. It's increasing fuel prices, grocery prices, everything. I've even seen cafes adding fuel surcharges."

Kristy condemned Labor's cutting of social spending, including the NDIS. "There are students in my classroom relying on disability supports and families already struggling. Those cuts are going to flow directly into schools and onto teachers and ES staff."

Speaking on the impossible demands placed on ES workers, she said: "One ES in my class supports multiple high-needs students, manages medication, monitors feeding tubes, gets food for hungry kids, handles behavioural issues and gets pulled away to support other students as well. They're doing incredibly complex work on poverty wages."

Kristy said the union bureaucracy had responded to growing opposition among teachers with censorship and intimidation. "I commented on the AEU Facebook page asking why the media knew about the deal before members did, and whether the workload wording had been improved. Later I realised I'd been blocked completely."

She said union leaders' claims to support "robust discussion" were contradicted by their actions.

"How can you say you encourage debate when you're deleting comments and blocking members for asking legitimate questions? The ratification process under which sub-branches cast bloc votes rather than allowing individual teachers to vote directly is not democratic. It should just be one person, one vote. Instead, your vote disappears inside whatever the majority position is in the sub-branch. That doesn't inspire confidence or transparency."

Kristy said teachers were increasingly discussing taking further action. "There's a lot of appetite for further strike action. Opposition to the agreement is spreading rapidly across schools and online teacher forums. Many feel silenced. Rank-and-file members aren't actually making decisions—we're being told this has been decided for you, like it or lump it."

"People can't keep going like this. Teachers are exhausted, angry and looking for another way forward."

**Joshua**, a high school teacher in his seventh year of teaching, was highly critical of the AEU's proposed deal, including the misleading claims about wage rises that, in reality, would not catch up with inflation.

"I think locking ourselves into an agreement for four years is just silly. We were locked in for the 2022 deal for an extended period where inflation skyrocketed, regressing wages. I bet the government would be thrilled to have that locked in for years. It's a great deal for them."

Like other teachers, Joshua noted the union's censorship of discussion, saying: "There is not a lot of room for freedom of discussion or debate and certainly not on the union's social media channels where they've been censoring a lot of people who engage in any kind of challenge to what they're saying."

Joshua also pointed to the salaries of the AEU executives, noting that Meredith Peace, the secretary of the Victorian AEU until 2024, was paid \$450,000 in her final year, including \$200,000 of accrued leave entitlements.

"How does someone get up to \$200,000 leave entitlement?" he asked. "The AEU in Victoria has five people on the executive each earning quarter million-dollar salaries. So, it's interesting to see how the union officials can use language about solidarity when they earn so much more than the people they are supposedly representing."

"It feels like the union are acting more as middle-men, not necessarily representing us, but equally representing the government. They're acting like they're in the middle and trying to make both parties as happy as possible, which is why they're trying to sell such a terrible deal."

Teachers and ES staff 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 of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

#### **Contact the CFPE:**

Email: [cfpe.aus@gmail.com](mailto:cfpe.aus@gmail.com)

Facebook: [facebook.com/commforpubliceducation](https://www.facebook.com/commforpubliceducation)

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

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