Australia: Vote No to the third AEU-Labor Sellout! Build the Victorian Educators Rank-and-File Committee!

Committee for Public Education
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The Australian Education Union (AEU) bureaucracy and the Carroll Labor government have tabled their third attempt to impose a sellout enterprise agreement on Victorian public school teachers, principals and Education Support (ES) staff.

This is not a step forward or a victory in the slightest, but an attempt to bludgeon educators into accepting what they twice rejected by 57.7 percent in June and 51.2 percent in July. It is also a bid to prevent teachers from taking their third mass strike, which was due to be held next Wednesday.

This is fundamentally the same agreement, repackaged with cosmetic adjustments designed to provide the bureaucracy with window dressing to claim progress, while preserving the fundamental program of austerity, untenable workload, wage cutting and inadequate funding.

Once again, the AEU is attempting to stampede educators towards a "yes" vote, in a completely anti-democratic manner. The ballot, lasting only a week, was opened on Monday as soon as the deal was finalised, before teachers had had any opportunity to read it, much less debate or discuss it.

The rushed ballot is accompanied by scare tactics, claiming teachers must accept the deal before the Department can seek an intractable bargaining order from the Fair Work Commission from 1 October 2026 that may impose a worse settlement.

The concept that teachers must agree with an offer which is almost identical to the one rejected twice before or they are branded as "intractable" and threatened with being punished for their opposition by the imposition of a "worse" agreement only highlights the anti-democratic character of the entire process. The union then applies the added pressure that, due to the elections, the Carroll government will go into caretaker mode on November 3, and if a Liberal/One Nation government was elected, matters could be worse.

The Committee for Public Education (CFPE) calls on all educators—teachers, ES staff and principals, union and non-union alike—to vote no and reject this assault on their pay and conditions.

Wages: A decade of losses entrenched

A $2,000 sign-on payment included in the new deal must be seen for what it is: a one-off bribe designed to help sell an agreement to educators who have received no pay increase since June 2025. It does nothing to reverse the approximately 10 percent real-wage loss suffered since 2021, when the previous AEU sellout locked in sub-inflationary increases of less than 2 percent while the cost of living surged. A single lump sum cannot compensate for years of declining purchasing power. The much-promoted $2,000 payment amounts to roughly two months of groceries for a family with two children—not a permanent increase in wages.

The headline wage figure of 28–32 percent over four years, from 2026 to 2030, is identical to that which was previously rejected by educators. It is not indexed to inflation and barely matches—or, in some scenarios, falls below—forecast inflation, particularly given the economic instability generated by the US-led war against Iran and resurgent inflationary pressures. The AEU's original log of claims demanded 35 percent over three years, not four.

Without automatic cost-of-living adjustments, any further inflation spike will leave educators exposed for the agreement's entire four-year term. The deal asks them to gamble their living standards on the hope that inflation remains contained, even as the government pours tens of billions into war and the global economic crisis deepens.

For ES staff, the situation is even more severe. Applying the same percentage increase to a base that can be as low as $60,000 perpetuates poverty wages. Many ES staff are forced to hold second jobs while performing increasingly complex medical, special-needs and behavioural-support roles.

A new clause provides a meagre 1 percent annual "Top of Range" lump sum for teachers, learning specialists, leading teachers, assistant principals and ES staff at maximum subdivision, contingent on "successful Performance and Development outcomes." Apart from being a pittance, this is a step towards performance pay: divisive, individualised incentives that undermine collective bargaining and pressure educators to comply with Departmental assessments.

Workload: The crisis remains and deepens

Embedding face-to-face teaching hours in the agreement—18.5 hours for secondary teachers and 21 hours for primary teachers—instead of the accompanying Deed, does nothing to overcome the workload crisis and growing stress and teacher burnout. Victorian teachers will still spend among the highest proportions of their working week in front of classes nationally.

Teachers routinely work 50–60 hours a week, pushing planning, assessment and reporting into evenings, weekends and holidays. Monash and UNSW research found one in three educators do not expect to remain in public schools until retirement, with 80 percent citing largely unmanageable workload. As a result, 90 percent reported moderate to extremely severe stress.

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The “one meeting per week” reduction touted by the government and union is insulting when teachers are drowning in administrative tasks, compliance requirements and increasingly complex student needs amid a scarcity of staff and resources. Four Professional Practice Days per year cannot offset the daily time deficit.

Class Sizes: No caps, no limits

The agreement contains nothing on enforceable class-size caps. It reproduces the failed framework of the 2022 agreement, citing “planning guidance” rather than binding limits. The principal retains “ultimate administrative and operational responsibility” and can exceed the guidance by citing “fixed resources,” the “physical facilities schedule” or the size of classroom spaces. The addition of “consideration of the impact of individual student complexity on class size” to long-term planning is advisory only.

Every additional student increases planning, marking, reporting, communication and behavioural-management demands. Without enforceable caps and automatic relief when limits are exceeded, class sizes will continue to rise, particularly as billions are withdrawn from public education funding, translating into fewer staff, larger groups, stress and burnout.

Disability Inclusion Funding

The AEU presents the revised agreement as providing “funded release time” for staff undertaking Disability Inclusion Profile work. But this claim does not withstand scrutiny. The agreement merely requires schools to recognise “the time required by employees for participation in the Disability Inclusion Profile process” as part of long-term planning. It specifies neither a number of hours nor a guaranteed release entitlement, and contains no requirement for replacement staff or dedicated funding. This is not an oversight but a deliberate omission.

This must be considered against the federal Labor government’s assault on the NDIS—the largest cut to a social program in Australian history. As thousands of children and young people lose access to NDIS supports, public schools will be expected to absorb greater responsibility for students with complex disabilities and additional needs, without the funding, staffing and specialist resources required. The agreement locks in these conditions for four years, precisely as this crisis is set to deepen.

The “No Further Claims” clause amounts to a four-year no-strike clause, running until 10 August 2030. It is the central mechanism for neutralising educators’ opposition. Amid inflation, the gutting of the NDIS, deepening education funding crisis and economic instability generated by war, four years of industrial peace would be a strategic victory for the government—and a betrayal of every educator who walked off the job on March 24 and July 23.

A political struggle against Labor

This third deal cannot be understood in isolation. It forms part of a coordinated austerity offensive by state and federal Labor governments, acting on behalf of the corporate and financial elite. The Albanese government’s May budget contained $63.8 billion in cuts to social spending over four years, including the gutting of the NDIS, while directing tens of billions towards the military as the Australian government supports US-led wars in Ukraine and the Middle East and prepares for war with China.

The resources exist to provide high-quality public education and decent conditions for all staff. What stands in the way is not economic necessity but a political system that prioritises corporate profit, militarism and elite privilege over the needs of the working class.

The AEU bureaucracy is an integral part of this system. Its response to two mass “no” votes and two mass strikes has not been to fight for educators, but to repackage the same agreement with cosmetic changes and ram it through via censorship and a series of anti-democratic measures. The bureaucracy cannot be pressured; it must be fought as an implacable opponent of educators’ interests.

Vote No, build rank-and-file committees!

The CFPE calls on all educators to vote “no” to this third sellout. But a no vote is not enough. The AEU apparatus has already shown it will simply repackage the agreement and try again. The decisive task is to take the struggle out of the hands of the AEU bureaucracy by building the Victorian Educators Rank-and-File Committee—democratic, workplace based bodies controlled by teachers and ES staff.

The committee established at the CFPE-convened meeting on July 19 must be built in every school, circulating information and formulating demands based on the actual needs of educators and students, not on government claims of “affordability.” It must unite educators with other sections of the working class—including health workers, doctors and other public sector workers—who are confronting similar attacks.

The CFPE advances the following demands:

- An immediate 40 percent wage increase to recover the 10 percent real wage loss since 2021, with salaries indexed to inflation.
- Maximum class sizes of 15–20 students, with enforceable caps.
- A minimum of eight hours per week of guaranteed in school planning, assessment and collaboration time, with substantial reductions in face to face teaching.
- Hiring thousands of additional teachers and ES staff, including at least one permanent full time ES staff member for every class.
- Fully funded support for students with disabilities, including employing thousands of psychologists, medical professionals and specialist staff, with binding provisions for time release and funding.
- No four year “no strike” clause.
- Billions redirected from military expansion into public education, an end to subsidies for elite private schools, and guaranteed free high quality public education for every child.

Defending public education requires a socialist perspective. The resources to provide high quality schools and decent pay already exist, but they are monopolised by billionaires, banks and corporations and funnelled into the war machine. They must be placed under public ownership and democratic workers’ control and redirected to social need rather than private profit.

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