Australia: Teachers on the front line of the NDIS cuts

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The Socialist Equality Party will hold an online public meeting this Sunday August 16 at 2 p.m. (AEST) to discuss a socialist perspective to fight the Albanese Labor government's sweeping attack on the NDIS. Click here to register.

The Albanese Labor government's bill to slash $38 billion from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) over four years, represents the largest single cut to a social program in Australian history. Some 241,000 participants will be removed by 2030 and an additional 105,000 will be denied access altogether, with children the primary targets.

Alongside people with disabilities and their families, this will also have a devastating impact on disability support workers, as well as health workers and teachers and education support staff in Australia's already crisis-ridden public hospitals and schools, who will be expected to bear the burden.

The numbers are staggering. Of the 241,000 participants set to lose access to the NDIS, 64 percent—some 154,240 people—will be aged 18 or under. Sixty percent, or 144,600, have autism or developmental delays listed as their primary disability. Under the new legislation, children aged eight and under with mild to moderate support needs will no longer be able to access NDIS funding at all.

Instead, they and their families will be referred to a state-based system—a so-called "Thriving Kids" scheme, a totally inadequate program providing a hotline, parent education, supported playgroups and almost no access to allied health professionals. Funding for individual early intervention therapies will be completely removed.

What this means in practice is a massive transfer of responsibility from the federally-funded NDIS onto state education systems that are already buckling under decades of underfunding, staff shortages and soaring workloads.

Under Labor's assault, children classified as having "low-to-moderate" support needs—typically those with Level 1 autism—will no longer be eligible for an individual NDIS plan.

Even for children with Level 2 autism, entry is no longer guaranteed by a medical diagnosis alone. Families must now present extensive clinical evidence of "profound, lifelong barriers to basic daily tasks."

Children aged eight and over will be subject to standardised "functional capacity assessments" of how much a disability impacts their day-to-day life. Those classified as having "low-to-moderate" support needs will still be denied access to the NDIS.

National modelling indicates that roughly 35 to 40 percent of school-aged children on the NDIS have "low-to-moderate" functional impacts. As the WSWS has explained, the needs of these children are anything but minor. They often require ongoing speech, occupational and psychological therapy, while struggling with communication, emotional regulation and daily functioning. They depend on structured support at school and at home.

The impact on teachers can be quantified to some extent by taking the public school system in the state of Victoria as an example. As of March 2026, over 28,000 children in this system had completed a Disability Inclusion Profile (DIP) meeting. The DIP assesses adjustments required across six functional domains—learning, general tasks and demands, communication, mobility, self-care, and interpersonal interactions. It is the gateway to unlocking individualised funding for school-based support.

An estimated 15,000 to 22,000 new DIPs will need to be completed in Victoria once the NDIS cuts take full effect. Across the state, more than 52,000 children aged 0 to 8 are active NDIS participants. This age bracket has the highest percentage of children with mild-to-moderate developmental impacts, estimated at 60 to 70 percent of the cohort.

These children will be pushed off the NDIS and into whatever under-resourced state alternative emerges, and into classrooms that are already stretched past breaking point.

For classroom teachers, the consequences will be profound. The DIP process itself is extraordinarily time-consuming. Each profile meeting requires extensive documentation, evidence gathering, observation and reporting across multiple functional domains. Teachers must

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also contribute detailed assessments, attend case conferences, and then implement the resulting individualised plans—all while managing classrooms of 20 to 30 students with diverse needs.

This is the hidden labour that the state Labor government and the Australian Education Union (AEU) claim their latest revised sellout agreement provides "funded release time" for. In reality, the proposed deal merely requires schools to recognise "the time required by employees for participation in the Disability Inclusion Profile process" as part of long-term planning. There is no guaranteed release entitlement in the proposed agreement.

As the Committee for Public Education has documented, Victorian teachers are routinely working 50 to 60 hours a week, with critical tasks—planning, assessment, reporting—pushed into evenings, weekends and holidays. Chronic understaffing and unsustainable workloads have driven thousands out of the profession. Now, tens of thousands of children stripped of NDIS supports will arrive in classrooms with heightened needs and no corresponding increase in resources, specialist staff or funding.

The challenges extend far beyond paperwork. Teachers will face increased responsibility for differentiating lessons, adapting assessment tasks and developing personalised learning strategies for students who previously received intensive external support. They will spend more time coordinating with speech pathologists, occupational therapists and psychologists—where such services remain available—and more time managing the distress of families who have been thrown off the scheme and have nowhere else to turn. The emotional labour of supporting students with complex needs while managing parental expectations that exceed available resources is itself a significant and growing source of burnout.

The attacks on the NDIS and public schools must be seen in context. The same Albanese government that is stripping $38 billion from disability support has raised annual military spending to around $60 billion and committed $368 billion to the AUKUS nuclear submarine program, integrating Australia directly into US-led war preparations against China.

As the SEP has stated, war abroad means war against the working class at home. The NDIS cuts are the spearhead of a broader offensive against all social programs—health, education, welfare—to finance militarism and protect corporate profits.

Far from organising resistance to this assault, the AEU has merely said: "Any budget savings in the disability sector have the potential to increase budgetary and workload pressures in public schools so we will be seeking further details about these measures from the Government."

In reality, the AEU is functioning as an instrument of the Labor government. In Victoria, its officials have spent months attempting to ram through sellout enterprise agreements that lock in real wage cuts while leaving the central issues—workload, class sizes, face-to-face teaching time and staffing—entirely untouched. When educators voted down an AEU-endorsed deal in June—the first such rejection in more than four decades—the union responded by twice repackaging the same agreement and attempting to bulldoze it through under anti-democratic conditions.

A genuine fight against the NDIS cuts requires the building of new organisations of workers.

This is the perspective that will be discussed at the online public meeting on August 16, convened by the Socialist Equality Party together with the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee and the Committee for Public Education, the educators rank-and-file network. The meeting will advance the demands to halt the NDIS cuts and redirect the billions squandered on war and the military to publicly owned, democratically controlled disability, health and education services.

The Victorian Educators Rank-and-File Committee, established in July, brings together educators, union and non-union alike, to take control of the dispute out of the hands of the AEU leaders. Its demands include maximum class sizes of 15 to 20, guaranteed in-school planning time, the hiring of thousands of additional teachers and education support staff, and fully funded support for students with disabilities, including psychologists and specialist staff in every school.

These demands cannot be realised through appeals to Labor, the Coalition, the Greens or the trade union apparatus. They require the independent political mobilisation of the working class against the capitalist system itself. People with disabilities, their families, health workers and educators must establish rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracy and every capitalist party, to unify their struggles into a political and industrial counter-offensive against austerity and war.

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