

Australia: ACT educators join limited stoppages but union prepares a sellout

Kaye Tucker
28 October 2026

Public school teachers in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) joined district-by-district stopwork actions last week, fighting real pay cutting, worsening conditions and poor student support by the ACT Labor government.

After a one-day strike in June, the Australian Education Union (AEU) has cancelled further fortnightly stopworks, however. It is pleading for a deal with the government, even while threatening to call another 24-hour strike next month.

College teacher Andrew Hirschfeld told *Region*: “We well and truly should have been striking since the very start. Teachers are fed up.” He described the workload as “non-stop.” He spoke of teachers not taking sick leave because they knew there would be no cover.

High school teacher Lauren Bingley added that the industrial action was a clear sign “things have gotten pretty dire.” She described classes of 100 students in the library, with two teachers “basically babysitting.”

A teacher from one of the secondary colleges told the *World Socialist Web Site*: “I see the minister is saying ‘close to a deal’ on the radio. This is not what I am seeing on the ground. Urgent action is needed by this government, or they will lose more teachers for the start of 2027.”

A 24-hour strike on June 11 shut all 93 public schools, specialist schools and preschools, with more than 2,000 teachers, learning support assistants and other workers rallying in Canberra. In September, members rejected the government’s 9 percent pay offer over three years. That represented another real wage cut against inflation, for educators already earning around \$4,000 less in real terms than in 2022.

With the Labor government in office since 2001, sometimes in coalition with the Greens, ACT public school teachers had not previously taken strike action

in 15 years.

The AEU bureaucracy is working to contain and betray the current struggle. The union’s log of claims contains no concrete wage demand, and its conditions on staffing, class sizes and support services are deliberately vague. AEU branch president Angela Burroughs has endorsed the government’s supposed “needs-based” restructuring, by which 58 of the territory’s public schools will see their funding fall in 2027.

The AEU’s trajectory is no different from that in Victoria, where the AEU responded to two “no” votes and statewide strikes by repackaging the same sellout agreement with cosmetic changes, leaving educators facing continued intolerable conditions. The AEU is reportedly in “intensive” negotiations with the ACT government to work out a deal to end the strikes. Education Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith’s claim that “bargaining is now progressing well” is the signal that a sellout is being prepared.

Chief Minister Andrew Barr’s government is simultaneously slashing school budgets, pleading poverty and preparing a deal with the AEU. Labor faces a \$323.4 million budget shortfall, with net debt projected to approach \$14.1 billion by the end of the decade.

The ACT Labor government is in lockstep with the federal Labor government of Anthony Albanese, whose May budget outlined more than \$63 billion in social spending cuts over four years. That included the gutting of \$38 billion from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), while raising military spending to a record \$60 billion annually, primarily for the AUKUS preparations for war against China.

There are billions for war; there is no money for schools. The ACT’s budget “shortfall” reflects this

same class policy.

A recent Auditor-General's report on Infrastructure Canberra revealed a similar process: a quarter of community facilities assessed in 2021 were found "run-down" or "poor," and the agency never acted on the findings.

It is likewise with the government's "Thriving Kids" program, which was meant to be launched on October 1 as the territory's answer to the NDIS cuts. Three weeks in, Disability Minister Suzanne Orr said the program would not be fully implemented until January 2028.

The program is supposed to provide early support for children up to eight with developmental delays, neurodivergence and emerging disabilities—including those who no longer qualify for the NDIS.

The children denied NDIS support are now being pushed into already underfunded, understaffed schools, where teachers and learning support assistants are expected to absorb the burden. The educators and the families on the Thriving Kids waiting lists are confronting the same attack.

The Greens' response is a study in fake opposition. Laura Nuttall, a Greens member for the ACT Legislative Assembly, observed that the main new services visible to families appeared to be "a website and telephone line." But she merely demanded public reporting of waiting times, provider availability and outcomes, not for the restoration of the billions stripped from the NDIS.

The struggle of ACT educators cannot be won by appealing to the same Labor government that is carrying out the attack, nor by trusting the union apparatus that is now manoeuvring to shut down the first industrial action for 15 years.

The fight for decent wages and conditions, and for a properly funded public education system, is inseparable from a political struggle against Labor—in the territory and federally—and against the austerity-and-war agenda it serves.

That requires educators to build their own organisations: rank-and-file committees in every school, independent of the union bureaucracy, through which they can democratically formulate and fight for their demands. Through the Committee for Public Education (CFPE) and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), ACT educators can link their struggle with those of

their counterparts in Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and around the world.

The fight for public education is inseparable from the struggle against the capitalist system itself—a system that subordinates the education of children to the profit demands of big business and the plunge into war.

To discuss this perspective and how to form rank-and-file committees, contact the CFPE.

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

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

Authorised by Cheryl Crisp for the Socialist Equality Party, Level 1/457-459 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, NSW, 2010, Australia.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact