

Australia: Queensland teachers to protest against derisory government pay offer

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Public school teachers in Queensland will join a rally outside state parliament in Brisbane on Tuesday against the Liberal National Party (LNP) state government's "offer" of a three-year agreement that will continue years of real pay-cutting, under-funding, severe staff shortages and heavy workloads.

On pay, Premier David Cristafulli's government is proposing a 3 percent rise from July, followed by a 2.5 percent increase in each of the next two years. That is scarcely higher than the current official inflation rate of 2.4 percent, let alone the real soaring living costs confronting workers. In addition, the deal would scrap cost-of-living adjustment payments promised in the 2022 agreement.

Under the government's deal, a beginning teacher with a four-year degree would only reach an annual salary of \$84,000 by 2027, while a senior teacher would get \$116,000. The median house price in Brisbane, the state capital, is already \$1 million, 10 times average teachers' earnings.

The Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) has criticised the offer as "an affront" that lifts "the lid on the government's true disdain for education professionals and union members." This is just hot air to try to contain the anger of teachers.

In the first place, the QTU has said nothing about what pay levels it will accept. Secondly, the QTU is proposing no action. Instead, it is appealing for a settlement with the government to head off calls by members for industrial action.

In fact, the union leaders have held 14 negotiation meetings with the government and plan further talks, seeking such a deal.

In a June 20 media release, QTU president Cresta Richardson said: "QTU representatives have met regularly with the government and discussions up to

this point have been productive and constructive."

The media release appealed for an agreement, saying: "With the current agreement expiring on 30 June, the Queensland Teachers Union is now exploring all options on behalf of its 48,000 members, including potential industrial action should a more substantial offer not be forthcoming before its expiration."

Like that of its state Labor Party predecessor, the government's wages policy continues to subject all public sector workers to punitive pay rise caps, despite inflation and government-union pay deals resulting in working-class households experiencing the largest fall in living standards for decades.

Opposing a similar pay deal to that offered to the teachers, Queensland's public sector nurses and midwives have voted by 96 percent to take industrial action for the first time in 23 years. But the Queensland Nurses and Midwives Union is working to keep any action as limited as possible, currently confining its members to wearing badges and pink clothes, and putting up posters.

Both trade unions are isolating their members from each other, and from other public sector workers, despite their common struggle.

Teachers have already had bitter experiences with the QTU. In 2022, the union urged its members to accept an agreement with the then Labor state government for 11 percent pay rises over three years. This was far below the then official inflation rate of 6–7 percent per annum. In other words, the QTU pressured teachers to accept a pay cut.

The 2022 agreement continued to cut real wages after Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk's Labor government imposed a near two-year wage freeze when the COVID-19 pandemic first hit in 2020.

To push through that sellout, the QTU leaders warned

teachers that if they did not accept the offer, the dispute could lead to a protracted industrial campaign that could end up with teachers losing in the Queensland industrial court.

In the 2022 sellout, the QTU leadership agreed that any measures to deal with the acute staffing, workload and funding crisis wracking the state's public schools would have to wait until a promised review was completed by the education department, which was not due until the end of 2024.

Since then, the QTU has declared that any future three-year agreement needed to include a government commitment to implement the outcomes of the review. However, by mid-2025 the government is still refusing to say when it will release a two-year study into teacher resourcing.

A 2024 survey of Queensland state school principals found that more than half had unfilled teaching positions, the highest proportion of any Australian state. Almost half said they were constantly reducing the range of specialist classes due to staff shortages and 32 percent said they were regularly merging classes.

Over 70 percent of principals and teachers reported a decline or significant decline in student well-being and engagement in the previous 18 months, and 65 percent reported a significant decline in teacher well-being and morale, the highest proportion of any state or territory.

Workloads remain unsustainable, with the number of teachers committing to staying until retirement halving from 40 percent in 2020 to 20 percent in 2024.

Queensland state schools are currently underfunded by \$1.6 billion a year. The federal Labor government's so-called Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, much vaunted by the teacher unions, involves a nominal increase to public schools of \$16.5 billion over ten years. This is a drop in the bucket compared to what is required. Moreover, most of the pledged funding has been back-loaded into the 2030s—that is, if it ever eventuates.

Federal Education Minister Jason Clare has also insisted that the promised funding is not a "blank cheque." The agreement comes with demands for new standardised testing for children and greater "accountability" for teachers, which will add to their already unsustainable workloads.

Teachers and school workers need to take matters into their own hands. The fight for decent wages,

workloads and properly funded public education means a determined political and industrial fight against the state and federal governments and their union partners.

Everywhere, the unions' role is to stifle any unified threat to corporate profits and the political establishment, whether led by Labor or the LNP. To fight for real wage increases and decent, safe conditions for all, educators need to join nurses and other public sector workers in forming rank-and-file committees, totally independent of the unions.

These committees can formulate demands based on the actual needs of workers, not the dictates of the financial markets, and coordinate unified industrial action.

To discuss this perspective, please contact the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the educators' rank-and-file network.

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

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