

Australia: Teachers rally against Queensland government's pay “offer”

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Hundreds of Queensland public school educators rallied outside the state parliament in Brisbane last week, protesting against the wage-cutting deal proposed by the Liberal National Party (LNP) state government.

The government's offer to the Queensland Teachers Union (QTU)—including an 8 percent pay increase over three years—would continue years of real wage-cutting, severe staff shortages and heavy workloads under the union's agreement with the previous state Labor government.

Demonstrations also occurred in the state's regions. Many educators held home-made placards expressing anger and frustration over acute staffing shortages, unbearable workloads and increasingly violent workplaces.

Other placards called for the release of a review of the resourcing of Queensland schools, promised in 2022 as part of the last enterprise agreement.

The LNP government has refused to release the findings of the Comprehensive Review of School Resourcing (CRoSR)—the first such review undertaken in 30 years—until after the current wage agreement is settled.

In 2022, the QTU hailed the previous Labor government's agreement to conduct this review as a victory. The union signed off on a below-inflation pay offer that delayed any measures to address workloads, staffing shortages and school underfunding until the review was completed in 2024.

After a near two-year wage freeze by Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk's Labor government, the QTU executive urged its members to accept an 11 percent rise over three years at a time when the official annual inflation rate stood at 6 percent in the state's capital, Brisbane.

While teachers at the rally showed their determination to fight, speakers sought to divert them into appeals for a deal with Premier David Crisafulli's LNP government. In

January, when the QTU began its closed-door negotiations with the state education department, the union stated that all options were on the table, including potential strike action.

However, speakers at the rally urged teachers to write to their local MPs, an activity designed to demobilise them and sow illusions that letters of protest would shift the government.

No speaker at the rally foreshadowed strike action. Union leaders also put forward no concrete salary demand but continued to use the vague formulation, “nation leading salaries.”

This is a warning of another sellout, as in 2022. The QTU is creating the conditions for any improvement to the government's offer, no matter how small, to be declared a “victory.”

Queensland Education Minister John-Paul Langbroek has expressed confidence that his government can rely on the union to impose yet another rotten deal. Speaking to the media the day after the rally, he said: “This is part of the negotiations that go on through an enterprise bargain process.”

Referring to the QTU, Langbroek added: “I'm confident that while they've rejected our first offer, that we've had 14 rounds of negotiations, there's more to come, and we'll make sure that we do a deal with the teachers.”

Langbroek said he had reached a deal with the QTU “without any real dramas” in 2012, the last time he was the education minister, under the previous hated LNP government of Campbell Newman.

One such possible “deal” was referred to by a QTU executive member, Tom McCartney, who told teachers at the rally: “If we get the CRoSR, then we can negotiate.”

This is a political trap. Even if the CRoSR is released, no funding for any of its recommendations was allocated in the government's 2025-26 budget, handed down last

week.

Conscious of widespread anger among the 65,000 public school teachers in the state, the QTU leaders are feigning outrage over the pay offer. The fact is that the sub-inflationary proposal is not an aberration. It is a continuation of both LNP and Labor governments undermining public education.

Recent estimates are that state and federal government funding for private schools is increasing by more than six times than for public schools. This has led to a fall in enrolments in government schools, while enrolments at private schools rise.

It is no secret that Australia's public schools enrol the most disadvantaged students but are provided with the least funding. Public schools, especially those in working-class areas, are burdened with crumbling infrastructure, inadequate provisions to deal with complex student needs and staff shortages, while teachers deal with crushing workloads and declining real wages.

The funding for the federal Labor government's current misnamed Better and Fairer Schools Agreement is a drop in the bucket compared to what is required. In addition, just 2.4 percent of the \$16.5 billion total will eventuate in the next four years. Federal Education Minister Jason Clare has also emphasised that the funding is not a "blank cheque"—it will come with conditions that will likely add to teachers' already intolerable workloads.

Moreover, a QTU state counterpart, the New South Wales Teachers Federation (NSWTF), has for years fostered false hopes of reversing the assault on public education via inquiries like the CRoSR.

In 2001, the NSWTF commissioned the Vinson Inquiry, which documented the impact of funding cuts, including mounting workloads, inadequate facilities and a growing education crisis in working-class areas. Premier Bob Carr's NSW state Labor government ignored its paltry recommendations.

Two decades later, the NSWTF commissioned the Gallop Inquiry, which identified that the same problems had developed further, only to be dismissed by NSW Liberal Premier Gladys Berejiklian's government.

This record underscores the fact that the fight by teachers for decent wages, conditions and permanent jobs, and for high-quality and fully-resourced public education, can proceed only through a rebellion against the trade union bureaucracies that have collaborated with one government after another.

Rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by educators, must be built in schools. Through such

committees, educators from all corners of the sector, from schools to TAFE colleges and universities can prepare a unified struggle.

These committees can break out of the isolation in which educators are kept separate, state by state, by the union apparatuses. As a start, teachers need to unite their fight with those of Victorian educators who are also waging a struggle for decent salaries and working conditions.

In 2022, as in Queensland, Victorian teachers were sold out by the Australian Education Union (AEU), which pushed through an agreement with a Labor government that saw base wages rise by less than 2 percent a year, far below the inflation rate, and did nothing to mitigate untenable workloads and onerous working conditions.

There has to be a common struggle across the country against the straitjacketing of educators by the AEU and its state affiliates as governments, Labor and LNP alike, deepen the offensive against public education.

A political fight is necessary against the subordination of all human need, including for education, to the profit demands of the financial and corporate elite. That means taking up a struggle for a political alternative, socialism, under which society's vast resources are used to serve the needs and interests of the population as a whole.

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

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

Twitter: CFPE_Australia

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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