

# Australia: Queensland teachers overwhelmingly reject sellout agreement

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Public school teachers in the Australian state of Queensland last week voted by 67.6 percent to reject a union-state Liberal National Party government sellout agreement. The deal promised only a nominal 8 percent pay rise over three years and did nothing to address intolerable workloads, workplace safety and teacher retention.

The government's "offer" was another real wage cut compared to the latest inflation figures, showing prices resurging nationally by an annual rate of 5.2 percent in the September quarter, and even higher for housing, electricity, food and other necessities.

Despite the Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) trying to ram the deal through by telling teachers that the only alternative was a protracted arbitration process, the ballot saw the highest participation in such a vote in the union's 136-year history.

This followed the 50,000 teachers taking their first statewide strike in 16 years in August to oppose virtually identical sub-inflationary pay offers, only to have the QTU call off further action in order to negotiate with the government.

Last week's vote was a blow to the QTU bureaucracy, which, as the *World Socialist Web Site* warned from the outset, only issued its first strike call since 2009 to contain teacher anger while it prepared another sellout, as it did for years under previous state Labor governments.

Confronted by teachers' opposition, the union leadership has reluctantly threatened another one-day strike, sometime in the next three weeks, but only to appeal for a revised deal with the government to head it off.

Last week's overwhelming vote reflects intensifying discontent among educators and public service workers nationally, against Liberal-National and Labor governments alike. This is part of an international upsurge of working-class struggles, despite the efforts of the trade

union apparatuses to isolate, contain and halt strike action.

The potential for a unified working-class movement was underscored when about 2,000 Queensland Health workers, including radiographers, pharmacists and oral health professionals, voted by 98 percent to reject a similar pay-cutting proposal. The union covering them, the United Workers Union (UWU), has only said it will begin rolling protected industrial action from Friday.

On October 26, state Education Minister John-Paul Langbroek thanked the QTU for "negotiating in good faith" over several months since the August strike. He falsely claimed that an "historic" pay offer would see every teacher paid a salary "over \$100k annually by the end of the 3-year award agreement."

The corporate media trumpeted similar lies, with Nine Entertainment network headlining a former principal hailing the "gold star deal" as "world leading." In reality, beginning teachers would be paid \$95,000 in the third year of the proposed award, while soaring living costs are devastating working-class households. Annual incomes exceeding \$170,000 are now needed to purchase a median-priced house in Brisbane, the state capital.

The "no" vote is a rebuke to the QTU bureaucrats. While declaring that the union was taking a "neutral" position, they promoted the deal, describing it as a "package that presents real progress for our profession."

They anti-democratically rushed through the vote without providing teachers with the full text of the agreement. Teachers were given just four days to access a union "summary" and attend "information sessions" designed to keep them uninformed.

One teacher posted on social media: "None of our pre-set questions were answered [and] mics stayed muted during question time."

Hundreds of comments on the QTU's Facebook page denounced the offer. One stated:

"The offer is an insult to all teachers in Queensland."

Absolutely pathetic. So deflating, as we as educators work our backsides off. Get your act together QTU and fight for us... Our wages don't even keep up with inflation and the cost of living crisis we have been encountering over the past 4 years. Rates, power supply, food etc have gone up substantially each year, much more than the ridiculous 'final and best offer' of a 3 %, 2.5% and 2.5% increase for the next three years."

Other comments included:

"Doesn't seem like much of a change? What have the union been negotiating all these months!?!?"

"Can we call a stop-work meeting for this week to have a briefing and reaffirm our position to take a 'series' of strikes?"

"Terrible offer. No different from previous one before we went on strike. Vote NO!"

"This offer is terrible, it is even worse than the offer we accepted in EB 10, which saw our wages go backwards 6% in real terms. And there is no genuine workload reduction! I'll be voting NO."

"If this was after negotiation, then the entire QTU hierarchy should hang their heads in shame and resign."

"Time to REJECT the QTU that had the gall to present us with that offer."

Despite this outrage, the QTU is still pleading for a deal with Premier David Crisafulli's government. In announcing another possible 24-hour strike, the union said: "It continues to be the QTU's preference to reach an agreement with the government, however, we are firm in our resolve that we will keep campaigning."

This is fooling no one. The QTU is trying to cover up its own sordid role not only over the last six months but over one sellout deal after another, and to prevent teacher anger from erupting out of its control.

A teacher commented sarcastically: "One 24-hour strike maybe planned, maybe in the next three weeks. I bet the government are shaking in their boots with this level of ferocity from the QTU."

The government has also refused to publish the long-promised Comprehensive Review of School Resources (CRoSR) until after the current dispute is finalised. In 2022, the QTU struck a wage-cutting enterprise agreement with the then Palaszczuk state Labor government that put off any possible improvements to staffing, workloads and the funding crisis until that CRoSR was released, supposedly by the end of 2024.

Now the QTU has only pledged to "consult" with Crisafulli's government if the latter ever releases it.

The rejection of the QTU deal poses the urgent need for

the widest discussion among teachers on what is to be done next. The "no" vote is an important first step, but it is only the beginning of a fight against the deterioration of public schools and teachers' working conditions.

The QTU, like its state counterparts, works to keep teachers isolated as they plead with governments to return to the bargaining table in order to cobble together rotten agreements that pose no threat to the political establishment or corporate profits.

New organisations of struggle, rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade unions, are required in every school, democratically controlled by teachers themselves. These committees can unite with teachers, health workers and all public sector workers in the fight against the state and federal government agenda of austerity and war preparations.

As we discussed at a public meeting on October 26, called by the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the educators' rank-and-file network, and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), this agenda is part of a wider and deeper offensive against educators and students.

While starving public schools and universities of funds, the Albanese Labor government is pouring billions of dollars into military spending for the AUKUS pact against China, while backing the Gaza genocide and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

The CFPE advances the necessity for a political fight against the subordination of all human needs, including education, to the profit demands of big business. We urge teachers to contact the CFPE to discuss forming rank-and-file committees.

#### Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

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