

# Australia: Queensland Teachers Union stages token rallies instead of strike

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Instead of a promised strike, for which its members had voted, the Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) held after-school rallies in some places across the state last Thursday. The official QTU line of these rallies was to appeal to the right-wing Liberal National Party (LNP) Premier David Crisafulli to “intervene in our ongoing pay dispute.”

A QTU media release last Friday claimed that members had turned out “in huge numbers” to “call on this government to provide fair pay and working conditions that value teachers and school leaders, address the teacher shortage crisis, and keep us safe at work.”

The rallies were a “huge success,” according to the “members’ newsflash.” This is a fraud.

First of all, pleading to the government is a political dead end—and a preparation for a rotten sellout. Teachers voted last month by nearly 68 percent to reject a government “best and final” pay offer.

This vote was also a blow to the QTU leadership, which had endorsed the deal in an October 27 “campaign update,” falsely describing it as an “improved offer.”

That offer was for an 8 percent nominal pay rise over three years, far below the latest official inflation rate, which sat at 5.2 percent a year in the most recent September quarter.

Secondly, the truth is that the QTU’s bankrupt appeal to Crisafulli attracted few teachers to the main rally outside the state parliament building in Brisbane.

About 400 people, counting various trade union bureaucrats and politicians, attended the event. That was tiny compared to the more than 4,000 teachers who crammed into a Brisbane auditorium on August 6, during the first strike called by the QTU for 16 years.

That strike, which won widespread support among

students and parents, and throughout the working class, was meant to be just the first of a “series of 24-hour strikes,” for which teachers had voted. But the QTU then “paused” industrial action and finally called off a strike last Thursday.

In order to scrap Thursday’s one-day strike, just hours after scheduling a media conference to announce it, the QTU leaders said they wanted to avoid disruption to Year 12 students’ exams. As the *World Socialist Web Site* reported, this was a lie, because external invigilators supervise the exams, not teachers.

Some teachers voiced disgust on the QTU Facebook site. “When you start fighting, let me know,” one wrote. “We, the union, voted overwhelmingly for rolling strikes, not one strike day and then pander to empty government promises.

“Rallies before and after work are a joke during assessment period of term 4. If union leaders were in touch with what teachers are feeling, they would know this.”

At Thursday’s Brisbane rally, QTU leaders said nothing about their reversal of strike promises, instead warning of “protracted arbitration” in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, which is a pro-employer institution.

The officials mostly filled the half hour “rally” with aimless chanting and a sing-along to pro-union anthems.

At the start of the event, QTU deputy general secretary Leah Mertens and three teachers were sent to present Crisafulli with a letter and a box of cannoli. This was, according to the QTU media release, “in the hope he would be willing to come to the table and deliver QTU members a deal.”

This amounted to little more than a bad joke. Predictably unable to enter the parliament, Mertens

returned near the end of the rally, trying to make light of the failed stunt. “We were hoping Crisafulli would offer us a sweet deal before Christmas,” she told the audience.

Teachers who spoke to the WSWS at the rally expressed discontent. One who was nearing the completion of their first year in the profession, voiced disappointment and frustration with the union leadership’s lack of transparency about the months-long talks with the government.

He said the lack of strike pay was a significant concern for him and his colleagues who would otherwise wish to strike indefinitely in order to force government concessions. “A strike should run until a deal is reached,” he said, “the point is to be disruptive.”

Teachers also reiterated the August strike rally’s demand for the release of the Comprehensive Review of School Resourcing (CRoSR), which was promised by the previous state Labor government in 2022 to address the poor conditions and serious staff shortages. But officials made no mention of this in their speeches.

At Thursday’s rally, QTU president Cresta Richardson declared: “Clearly this Crisafulli government genuinely doesn’t value state education,” even while issuing a plea to the same government for a deal.

Toward the rally’s end, Richardson led the participants in grading the government’s actions to alleviate workplace conditions, stagnant pay and increased out-of-hours workloads. The audience shouted an “E” grading for each point, but many teachers may ascribe the same grading to the union’s performance.

During the week, the QTU spent undisclosed amounts on advertisements in newspapers across the state, urging Crisafulli to “Step up Premier, and be the leader you promised to be.”

This pitch to Crisafulli and his LNP government must be another warning of preparations for a sellout.

It also comes as teacher unions across the country face growing unrest among educators, reflected in stoppages by teachers in Tasmania and protests in Victoria, against Labor and Liberal-National governments alike. But the union bureaucrats nationally, represented by the Australian Education Union (AEU), have opposed any unified struggle.

The AEU is backing the Albanese federal Labor government, which is starving public schools and universities of adequate funding, while pouring billions of dollars into military spending for the AUKUS pact against China, backing the Gaza genocide and supporting the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

The Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the educators’ rank-and-file network, is urging teachers to draw the lessons of these experiences and set up their own committees to organise independently of the trade unions. Rank-and-file committees are needed across the public sector, and throughout all workplaces, to take up the fight against intolerable conditions and the preparations for war.

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

Twitter: CFPE\_Australia



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