

Australia: Queensland Teachers Union calls second one-day strike

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Facing mounting discontent among teachers, the Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) leadership last week announced a second 24-hour strike for this Tuesday, over the state Liberal National Party (LNP) government's continuation of years of real pay cuts, severe staff shortages and intolerable workloads.

Even in belatedly calling a stoppage, QTU officials pleaded for talks with right-wing Premier David Crisafulli to prevent the strike and end the dispute. This must be a sharp warning to teachers that the union is preparing another sellout agreement, just like the ones it imposed under the previous state Labor government from 2015 to 2024.

In announcing the stoppage, QTU vice president Leah Olsson told the media: "This strike could have been averted, this strike should have been averted... We need Crisafulli to pick up the phone and start the dialogue—this can end today."

Olsson said the union was prepared to halt strike action if the state delivered an improved offer or accepted the QTU's conditions for arbitration in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (QIRC). That arbitration could drag on for two years.

Similar unrest is brewing among teachers nationally, including stoppages and protests in Tasmania and Victoria. But the teacher unions, each affiliated to the Australian Education Union (AEU), are intent on keeping the struggles isolated to individual states. The union bureaucrats want to avoid a conflict with the federal Labor government, which is continuing to systematically underfund public schools.

The QTU leadership is still issuing pleas for a deal despite revealing in its media release that it has already held more than 20 backroom meetings with the state LNP government and a period of "conciliation" in the industrial commission.

Just last week, the union hailed after-school rallies, pleading unsuccessfully for talks with Crisafulli, as a "huge success." But as the *World Socialist Web Site* has reported, many QTU members have insistently called for strike action and have previously voted for it.

Members voted by nearly 68 percent last month to reject the government's "best and final" offer. This vote was a blow to the QTU leadership, which had endorsed the deal in an October 27 "campaign update," falsely describing it as an "improved offer."

Moreover, the government is still refusing to release the Comprehensive Review of School Resourcing (CRoSR), which was promised by the previous state Labor government in 2022 to address the workloads, poor conditions and resulting staff shortages.

On August 6, tens of thousands of teachers took part in the QTU's first strike in 16 years, having voted overwhelmingly for a "series of 24-hour strikes." Despite the government's refusal to budge from its initial offer of an 8 percent nominal pay rise over three years—well below the latest official inflation statistics, which showed the consumer price index (CPI) resurging to 5.2 percent on an annualised basis in the September quarter—the QTU delayed further action.

In response to last week's QTU rallies, which were called instead of a promised strike, many educators voiced their anger and frustration online.

On the QTU's Facebook page, one teacher wrote: "[T]hese half measures that exclude many of us are no good, give us the strikes we voted for!" Another wrote: "Sorry, but I'm over your weakness. Our conditions and lack of support have caused the teacher shortage. Ask every one of us who has either left or are going to."

Despite last week's strike action announcement, many remained critical of the QTU leadership. One

educator wrote: “Do I think it will be effective in Week 8, Term 4 when some kids are about to go on early holidays anyway? Not really. Do I think we should have had a second strike-day weeks ago? Yep. Will I still strike though? Yep.”

Another teacher made the link to the union’s betrayals under the state Labor government, which froze wages for 18 months in the first phase of the COVID pandemic, writing: “The best time to strike was three years ago in 2022, but the second-best time is now, and now is all we’ve got.”

On the QTU’s Facebook page, one teacher received numerous thumbs-up for this comment: “Why would we suddenly think the QTU works for us when they have sold us out time and time again over the last 20 years?”

Another teacher wrote: “I’ve lost all confidence in this Union, and I don’t believe that another day of strike action is going to change the outcome of arbitration, which we are certainly heading towards.”

In the face of this developing disaffection, a pseudo-left group, Socialist Alternative’s Queensland Teachers Fightback, is trying to corral teachers back into the bureaucratic and complicit straitjacket of the QTU and wider trade union apparatuses.

Despite decades of betrayals by the QTU, AEU and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), under Liberal-National and Labor governments alike, the Fightback group is telling teachers to “rebuild class-struggle unionism.”

That is “not going to happen overnight, but there are no alternatives,” a “QTU Fightback activist” wrote in Socialist Alternative’s *Red Flag* newspaper on November 20.

The article urged teachers to learn “how the processes of the union work: meeting procedure and protocol, moving and speaking to a motion.” These were “all valuable skills” to “give a lead to members who want to see the union fight for more.”

This is a recipe for keeping teachers’ opposition within the straitjacket of the union apparatus.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, all the unions, including the QTU, have been transformed into ruthless industrial policing agencies, to subordinate the opposition of workers to the “free market” dictates of the corporate elite and its political servants in parliament.

Today, the union bureaucracies are enforcing the

agenda of the federal Labor government, which is pursuing record military spending, all while cutting funding for public schools and hospitals, disability services and universities.

It is time to draw the political lessons of years of bitter experiences. Far from “no alternatives” there is definitely an alternative—an essential one. There must be a breakout of the union stranglehold. New forms of working-class organisation must be built—rank-and-file committees that will take up the fight for workers’ rights, amid the assault on workplace and living conditions and the preparations for war.

The Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the educators’ rank-and-file network, urges teachers to set up their own committees independent of the trade union machines. Rank-and-file committees are necessary in schools, across the public sector and throughout all workplaces.

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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