

Australia: Teachers denounce union pay “victory” in Queensland

Mike Head
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Public school educators in the Australian state of Queensland are voicing their anger at the misleading claim by the Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) that they had a “significant win” last week when the state’s industrial relations tribunal granted a supposed 3 percent interim pay rise.

Teachers have written numerous furious posts on the QTU’s Facebook page about the union’s celebratory media release, despite the union bureaucrats removing further critical comments. Denunciations have appeared as well on Reddit and other social media platforms.

The majority of educators, except for senior teachers on the highest pay grades, will receive far less than the 3 percent, which is itself well below the soaring cost of living. Some of the lowest-paid teachers will get nothing, or next to nothing, from the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (QIRT) ruling.

That is because the three QIRT judges based the 3 percent increase on the July 2024 base pay rates from the last expired Certified Agreement that the QTU struck with the previous state Labor government in 2022.

Some early- and mid-career teachers received small pay updates or award safety-net adjustments over the past two years. For them, the increase from the 2024 base rate is as low as 0.4 percent. Band 1 teachers, who are not yet fully qualified, got nothing.

The QIRT judges also rejected the QTU’s plea, alongside the Together Union, which covers support staff and specialists, for a 0.5 percent “cost-of-living adjustment.”

The judges even denied the unions’ limited request for backpay to February 1 this year. The QIRT ruled that the rise would only commence on September 7, thus constituting a more than two-year wage freeze for many educators.

Despite two widely supported 24-hour strikes last August and November, educators in Queensland remain straitjacketed by the QTU and the state Liberal National Party (LNP) government in the QIRT arbitration system, facing no relief from intolerable workloads and conditions until a possible QIRT ruling on the QTU’s log of claims, which could be handed down in 2027.

As in Victoria, teachers in Queensland held statewide strikes for the first time in many years, after repeated below-inflation

wage rises, growing work burdens, oversized classes, burnout, inadequate resources and worsening staffing shortages—all as a result of union sellout agreements.

Last year’s stoppages—the first in 16 years—saw tens of thousands of teachers and their supporters participate in rallies and marches across Queensland, voicing their determination to fight the increasingly intolerable conditions.

But the Australian Education Union (AEU) kept the struggles of teachers separated from each other, blocking a unified fight against the conditions that they confront across the country.

The AEU’s affiliate, the QTU, called off all industrial action in Queensland after the last strike in November, allowing the state LNP government to impose QIRT arbitration, banning all industrial action

One teacher commented on the QTU Facebook page: “A 3 percent salary increase when inflation is running at 3.8 percent is not a genuine pay rise... it is a real terms pay cut. Teachers will still have less purchasing power than they had last year. After nearly two years without an increase, presenting 3 percent as meaningful progress is deeply disappointing and does not reflect teachers’ workload, professional responsibilities or the growing cost of living.”

Another described the lack of back pay as a “bitter pill to swallow.” He wrote: “It’s going to be hard for reps to sell this to their colleagues as quite the win that this press release suggests. We’re objectively thousands of dollars worse off each than if we had accepted the already inadequate offer last year. Selling it as a win is going to make members feel gaslit.”

An educator asked: “How is this a win?? No back pay, increase will be less than 3 percent for most pay grades because of the award, and we’re still miles behind inflation.” Another wrote: “If this is what the QTU considers a ‘significant win,’ I hold no hope for future negotiations.”

Some comments were more emphatic. One teacher said: “That is NOT a win! We deserve to be paid backpay. We’ve already lost many amazing teachers in the last 2 years and this has just cemented how little we are valued.”

Another long-time teacher pointed to the deteriorating conditions. “This is not something to celebrate,” she wrote. “I’ve been a teacher for 19 years and I’ve never seen teachers struggling or staff shortages at the level I’m seeing now.”

Yet in its media release, the QTU insisted: “This is a significant win for QTU members and an important step forward in our ongoing campaign to be valued and fairly recognised for the work we do.”

The QIRT ruling is the latest result of the QTU’s betrayal of educators.

Teachers voted for a “series of 24-hour strikes” at mass rallies during their first strike on August 6 last year, only to have the QTU delay further action. Last October, teachers voted by nearly 68 percent in a ballot to reject the government’s “best and final” offer, which included an 8 percent nominal pay rise over three years—well below the soaring cost of living, which has been intensified by the criminal US-Israel war on Iran.

Teachers have fallen far behind the official inflation rate, which has ranged from 3.8 percent to 4 percent over the past 18 months, without taking into account rising home mortgage payments.

The last nominal increase in 2024 left teachers at least 6.5 percent behind inflation after an earlier 18-month pay freeze by the previous state Labor government when the COVID pandemic first broke out.

In addition, the LNP government has still refused to release a Comprehensive Review of School Resourcing (CRoSr) report that was promised by that state Labor government in 2022, as part of the last agreement, to address the workloads, poor conditions and staff shortages.

These conditions are also the product of previous arbitration processes that the QTU inflicted on teachers under Labor and LNP governments in 1997, 2000, 2003 and 2006.

The result is a worsening staffing crisis, despite the government’s growing use of trainee teachers and recruitment from overseas. According to state Department of Education data, there were 600 unfilled teaching jobs in the state’s regions in February, up from just over 500 active vacancies statewide in December.

That data shows the average teacher-vacancy rate across Queensland is about 1.8 percent, and that figure is much higher—up to 5.9 percent—in north, far north and central Queensland.

These conditions are leading more parents to transfer their children to better-resourced private schools, even at the expense of fees, as has been happening nationally for years.

Workloads have risen further due to higher numbers of students with complex needs, with public schools bearing the greatest proportion of the burden.

That strain will further increase dramatically as a result of the federal Labor government cutting \$38 billion from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) over the next four years. Tens of thousands of children on the autism spectrum or with other learning difficulties will be stripped of basic support programs and pushed into under-resourced schools.

Discontent is mounting among teachers. Dissatisfaction with

pay and conditions has erupted among teachers nationally over the past year, including stoppages and protests in Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria.

But all the AEU-affiliated teacher unions have kept the struggles isolated to individual states and territories, and then imposed sellout agreements that have done nothing to alleviate the public education crisis, let alone provide for the NDIS fallout.

Above all, the union bureaucrats want to prevent a working-class confrontation with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s federal Labor government, which is systematically underfunding public schools, while pouring billions of dollars into AUKUS and other preparations for a US-led war against China.

Conclusions need to be drawn from these bitter experiences. Educators have to break out of the Labor-union straitjacket and build new forms of working-class organisation—rank-and-file committees, completely independent of the trade unions.

These committees will democratically formulate and fight for demands, such as decent pay, more staff and smaller classes, based on educators’ interests and those of their students, not the dictates of governments, the financial markets and the rest of the capitalist class.

They will link up with educators and workers nationally and internationally and take up the necessary unified fight for first-class public education, against the assault on workplace and living conditions and the preparations for war.

To discuss forming rank-and-file committees, contact the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators’ network:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

Twitter: [CFPE_Australia](https://twitter.com/CFPE_Australia)

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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