



Speech by

Mr D. BRISKEY

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

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QUEENSLAND TEACHERS UNION; ENTERPRISE BARGAINING AGREEMENT

Mr BRISKEY (Cleveland—ALP) (12.20 p.m.): The Queensland Government has an obligation to provide all Queensland children with a quality education. This is an obligation that we take extremely seriously. The most valuable tool in the Government's kitbag in fulfilling this obligation is Queensland teachers. As a former teacher in this State's education sector—having been elected straight from the classroom in 1989, along with some other members of this House—I am in a unique position of having first-hand knowledge of the challenges teachers face every day. It is a difficult job and an important one. On this point, the Queensland Teachers Union and the Government wholeheartedly agree.

Queensland teachers' last enterprise bargaining agreement with the Government expired in February of this year. During subsequent negotiations, the Government has offered teachers a pay rise of 3% for each of three years. Queensland teachers, however, have sought a 24% pay rise over three years. As the Honourable Minister for Education told this House this morning, this dispute has now been sent to arbitration by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission and an interim offer of 3% from 1 June is now on the table. This is a one-off offer. It is an offer made in good faith because the Government values the work of teachers. The Beattie Labor Government believes it is fair and right that teachers receive some benefit now. The arbitration process can be quite lengthy. It is possible that this matter will not be resolved for many months to come.

It is important to note that the time lines for consideration of this matter are outside the hands of the Government. The independent umpire, the QIRC, will determine when this matter is finalised. In the interim, it is the unquestionable view of this Government that Queensland teachers are deserving of a pay rise, sooner rather than later. This is a without prejudice offer that would see money in the hands of our teachers now. In return, the only requirement of teachers in accepting this offer is to suspend industrial action for the duration of time it takes the QIRC to resolve this matter. In no way does the Government's offer interfere with the eventual resolution of this dispute by the independent umpire, the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission. It is the independent umpire that will decide this matter.

As the Minister told us today, Queensland teachers will have an opportunity to vote on this matter at a stop-work meeting on 6 June. I urge all Queensland teachers to attend. In order to ensure maximum participation in the vote, the Minister has said that no teacher will lose pay for their one-hour attendance. I tell teachers now that if they do not go to the stop-work meeting and do not vote they may well lose this money. The clear choice facing teachers on 6 June will be whether to take the money or not. It is a once-only offer. It is money now, irrespective of the commission's determination. The independent umpire will determine the quantum of pay rise for Queensland teachers and the Government will be bound by it, regardless of a decision by teachers now to accept the Government's interim offer of 3%.

It is worth while comparing this Government's offer with that made by the previous Government. Unlike the previous Government, the Beattie Labor Government requires nothing from teachers except the suspension of industrial action. At this point in the Debate, it is worth remembering Leading Schools and what that required of our teachers. Leading Schools was

discriminatory. That is why it was abolished by this Government. Leading Schools was about promoting an education system that would have seen haves and have-nots. The haves would have received resources; the have-nots were to miss out. Under the previous Government, non-Leading Schools would have been left behind. That sinister, inequitable approach to education was not about excellence. It was not about supporting all students, irrespective of location or need. It was not about education.

As the Minister told us this morning, it is worth comparing the Government's offer with an offer accepted just recently by New South Wales teachers. Queensland teachers are seeking 24% over three years. New South Wales teachers have accepted 16% over four and a half years, or an average of 3.55% per year. That is only a half a per cent more than the offer from this Government to our Queensland teachers. At the top rate at July 2002 were Queensland teachers to accept this Government's offer, they would receive just \$2.80 less per day than New South Wales teachers. At July 2002, a Queensland teacher on the top of the incremental scale would receive a salary of \$54,600. A New South Wales teacher would receive \$55,900.

In New South Wales, for just \$2.80 extra per day after tax, teachers have accepted the following concessions: annual performance reviews which may restrict progression through the pay scale; annual assessment of all teachers and their lesson plans; observation of a teacher's classroom practice; a requirement on teachers that they be prepared to teach at more than one location; extended working hours from 7.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. for Year 11 and 12 teachers; and an exchange of teachers between schools and the TAFE system. In Queensland we are not about looking over teachers' shoulders. In Queensland we prefer to operate on the basis of respect, trust and professionalism. In Queensland the Beattie Labor Government is not seeking an extension to working hours. We are not seeking annual reviews. In Queensland we respect teachers and we respect their professionalism.

The New South Wales EB agreement requires all of the foregoing from teachers in that State. In Queensland under the previous Government teachers were forced to agree to a position that would have seen gross discrimination against Queensland schoolchildren. The Queensland Teachers Union has said that the one requirement on them, that is, that they suspend industrial action until the QIRC has determined this matter, is excessive and somehow diminishes their bargaining power. When considering this point, I would ask Queensland teachers to further consider the offer which has been accepted by New South Wales teachers. As part of the enterprise bargaining agreement in that State, teachers have agreed to undertake no industrial action—no disruption to the learning opportunities for children—until after their agreement expires in early 2004.

Once again, I urge teachers to accept this interim offer in the spirit in which it is offered. I ask Queensland teachers to consider the recent experiences of their colleagues interstate. I ask them to look into the recent past and consider the actions of the previous Government. When making their decision on 6 June in deciding whether to accept or refuse this interim offer, I ask teachers to remember that this matter is now in the hands of the independent umpire, and the Government will be bound by the umpire's decision.

In closing, I once again say that many of us in this House have been teachers. There are many of us who understand the increasing stresses of a fast-changing world and its impact on the classroom. In acknowledgment of this, it is important that the Government has a relationship with these most important employees that is based on trust, respect and professionalism. I know that all teachers agree with this ideal. I know that the Queensland Teachers Union undertakes a great deal of activity on behalf of its members to foster this type of relationship, activities such as participation on local and State accommodation committees, selection panels and a range of educational advisory bodies. As a major stakeholder, their advice and input is frequently sought for the preparation of discussion papers and policies. Many of these activities are directly aimed at ensuring quality education outcomes for Queensland schoolchildren.

Teachers are the experts and it is important that we work hand in hand with them for the benefit of Queensland schoolchildren. That is what we are all about. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the QTU for its help in this regard. It is worth noting that it was only with the advent of the Labor Government in 1989 that the QTU was invited to participate. Its participation efforts enhance ours as a Government. I commend this offer to Queensland schoolteachers.
