



Speech by

Hon. GORDON NUTTALL

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

26 March 2003

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Teachers Union

Hon. G. R. NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.07 a.m.): As Minister for Industrial Relations, I am pleased this morning to announce that the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission has ordered the Teachers Union to end its campaign of disruption to our children's education and that these long running negotiations are now set down for arbitration.

After what has been nine months of difficult negotiations with a union that is renowned for confrontation, this government believes that these negotiations are where they should be—before an independent umpire. It has been disappointing, however, that we have had to apply to the commission to order a union to stop its unlawful industrial action. Both parties were told on Monday by the commission that negotiations would proceed directly to arbitration. Yet despite this decision, the union proceeded with its campaign of industrial action. Let me be very clear about this. The union's industrial action and disruption to students' education is unlawful. It is very clearly spelt out under section 149 of the Industrial Relations Act. Under the act, the union has been ordered to stop the industrial action from 4 p.m. today.

In the last two months the Teachers Union has breached the law at every step. It breached the law by taking industrial action three weeks before the determination had concluded. It breached a direction from the commission when the commission agreed to assist in talks between the parties. And it has openly breached the protocol document for good faith bargaining, which, I might remind the Teachers Union, not only they but also 17 other unions signed up to as the basis of good faith bargaining in this state.

In newspaper reports today they have clearly breached all the accepted standards for without prejudice and confidential negotiations. The *Courier-Mail* report this morning is accurate in that the government was prepared to negotiate the provision of additional teachers into classrooms and did explore the possibility that some of these teachers might be redeployed from the 6,000 non-classroom teachers employed by Education Queensland. Contrary to the union's claims in the report in the paper this morning, it was the QTU negotiators who identified reading recovery teachers as a possible source of teachers who could be redeployed into the classroom.

How could the government successfully negotiate with a union leadership hell-bent on acting outside the law, hell-bent on breaching confidentiality and hell-bent on acting dishonestly? This union is historically renowned for failing to negotiate. It is the only union in the 52 agreements we have with our 170,000 employees that has a determination because it could not reach agreement in the last round of enterprise bargaining in the year 2000. It is only one of two unions within both the public and the private sector in Queensland that has been unable to negotiate an agreement.

Only four times in the history of enterprise bargaining in Queensland has a union and a government had to seek arbitration. Three of those times has been with the Teachers Union and in negotiations not only with this side of politics but also with the other side of politics. Teachers must be disappointed that their wage rise has been delayed by the irresponsible actions of their union leadership. This union came to the negotiating table nine months ago with a \$6 billion claim. It was not fair and reasonable then and it is not fair and reasonable now.

Despite the QTU efforts to describe this dispute as a class size dispute, it has never accepted the government's wage offer. Contrary to the public claims by the president of the union, QTU negotiators have continued to seek wage outcomes significantly above 3 and a half per cent.

I would like to remind members of the House that the Teachers Union received the largest wage increase of any union in the last round of enterprise bargaining. No other union got close to the 14.75 per cent pay rise that this union received, and as a result Queensland teachers became the highest paid teachers in the country. Our offer of 3 and a half per cent—like 50,000 other public sector workers who have agreed so far in this round—would have kept the majority of our teachers as the highest paid in the country, and our teachers would have received a pay rise from almost a month ago.

We welcome the decision by the commission to put this matter directly into arbitration and to end the union's industrial disruption to our children's education. We look forward to arguing our case for a fair and reasonable outcome, not just for the government as an employer but also to balance our responsibility to the broader community which, after all, is paying for this wage rise.