National education and union news

SSTUWA
State School Teachers' Union of WA

Western Teacher volume 53.5 August 2024



Real wages growing but there is still ground to be recovered

A new Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report has confirmed that real wages are growing again in Australia for the first time in nearly three years.

The OECD's Employment Outlook 2024 confirms that real minimum wages grew by 2.3 per cent between 2019-2024.

However, despite recovering some of that lost ground, the report found that in Australia real wages are still 4.8 per cent lower than they were pre-pandemic in the last quarter of 2019.

Wages have grown less than in most OECD countries and below the median OECD average of 8.3 per cent.

The report also debunks any claims that there is a wage price spiral in Australia, pointing out that excessive profits have caused inflation and hurt workers real incomes.

"As real wages are recovering some of the lost ground, profits are beginning to buffer some of the increase in labour costs. In many countries, there is room for profits to absorb further wage increases, especially as there are no signs of a price-wage spiral," the report states.

Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) Secretary Sally McManus said: "The OECD report shows the damage done by 10 years of wages suppression under the last government. Fixing and closing all the wage cutting loopholes has been a big job and involved four pieces of legislation by the Albanese Government."

"The new laws are slowly becoming operational, and this is now showing up in the wage growth figures. This is the reason

Australian workers are finally getting ahead again with real wages up by 0.5 per cent in the last year.

“Unfortunately, the Coalition in office had a track record of delivering low wages growth and they still believe that it is a good thing. Last month, Shadow Finance Minister, Jane Hume said that the prospect of real wage growth for workers on awards would be ‘the worst thing for Australians.’ The reality is the worst thing for Australians is wages going backwards and this shows how out of touch they are.

“Now we have the OECD saying that real wages have ground to recover here, saying there is room for company profits to absorb further wage rises. They also point to profits, not wages, as driving inflation.”

Election of ACTU officials

The leadership team of ACTU President Michele O’Neil, Secretary Sally McManus, Assistant Secretary Liam O’Brien and Assistant Secretary Joseph Mitchell were re-elected at the ACTU Congress in June.

Held every three years, the ACTU Congress is the supreme decision-making body of the Australian union movement, with over 1,000 delegates in attendance representing more than 38 affiliated unions and nearly 1.8 million workers.

Held on Kaurna Country at the Adelaide Convention Centre, the Congress marks the first in-person gathering since 2018.

The ACTU leadership team were elected unopposed and issued the following statement: “We are honoured by the trust placed in us by the delegates at Congress 2024. Working people are facing cost-of-living pressures and unprecedented technological change – it’s important now more than ever to campaign for higher wages, better conditions and safer workplaces.

“Australian unions should be proud of the victories we’ve won for working families over the last couple of years. From achieving historic increases in award and minimum wages, to closing loopholes that big businesses exploit to drive down wages and conditions, to banning engineered stone and saving thousands of lives. These wins demonstrate the power of collective action, and we will build on these victories to achieve even more in the coming years.

“We’re always on the side of workers and will continue to build a better future for all of us, with wages we can live on and a future we’re proud to pass on to the next generation.”

Call for universal access to free public preschool

Those working in public education know just how important early childhood education is for children’s development.

When children attend preschool, they can expect greater academic success, have better career prospects, better health outcomes, and stronger family and personal relationships.

But despite this, Australia is one of the few developed countries around the world not offering two years of preschool for all children.

The Australian Education Union (AEU) is calling on the federal government to prioritise high-quality and universal access to early childhood education and care with the campaign Preschool Funding Now!

Right now, access to two years of preschool is dependent on where families live – some states/territories are rolling this out, while others are not.

Australia needs a national plan, so that all children around the country can access two years of high-quality public preschool, no matter their postcode.

A petition has been set up by the AEU where people can pledge their support for the call. Visit bit.ly/pfn-sign

No child should miss out on two years of preschool.

Workers seek 10 days paid reproductive leave

Australian unions are campaigning to win 10 days of paid leave so that workers can take time to deal with a range of reproductive health issues, such as IVF treatment and post-vasectomy recovery.

Unions are calling for the expansion of the National Employment Standards to provide access to 10 days paid reproductive leave to help workers manage fertility treatment, pregnancy, breastfeeding, menstruation, breast and prostate screening and

issues related to perimenopause and menopause.

Unions are also looking to expand the rights to flexible work arrangements to include reproductive health issues.

The Queensland Government has already agreed to 10 days reproductive leave for all its public servants. Entitlements to reproductive leave have also been won by workers through bargaining in industries such as healthcare, finance, education and the community sector.

Unions will pursue arrangements that are flexible enough to enable women in different life stages to access the leave in a way that works for them. This may include access to leave to address sexual and reproductive health issues, such as endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome. It could also be accessed to return to work post-childbirth.
Men will also be able to access reproductive leave for fertility treatment, prostate screening, as well as time to undertake and recover from a vasectomy.

Workers should have protections against being discriminated against due to reproductive health issues.

They should also be able to request flexible working arrangements to deal with their reproductive health because failure to do so can contribute to lower rates of workforce participation for women.

ACTU President Michele O'Neil said: "Reproductive health can impact all workers and will affect most workers at some stage in their life.

"Too many workers have been penalised or forced to bow out of employment because of reproductive health issues.

"Unions will campaign for a universal paid 10 days leave to enable all workers access to this important category of leave.

"Working people have already campaigned, and won, this entitlement at some workplaces but we want to see this extended as a basic entitlement to all Australian workers."

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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