

Hundreds rally to fight Nippon Opal paper cuts harming workers

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ACTU President, Michele O’Neil has slammed Nippon Paper’s Opal management, demanding an immediate end to the lockout of over 300 production workers from its Morwell Paper Mill in the Latrobe Valley.

Local management of the paper manufacturer Opal, owned by Japanese multi-national Nippon Paper, locked out its production workforce indefinitely 21 days ago – leaving them without wages.

With the lockout in its third week, hundreds of Nippon Paper Opal mill workers travelled to Melbourne today for a rally outside the multi-national’s headquarters in inner-city Richmond.

They protested at the harshness of the lockout and the extreme action taken by the company.

The company ordered the lockout after seven CFMEU Manufacturing workers took six-hours of protected stop-work action; the first such action in two decades.

Addressing the rally, ACTU President Michele O’Neil said the lockout was an abuse of power by a multi-national seeking to crush its Australian workforce and called on Nippon Paper Opal local managers to sit down with workers and CFMEU Manufacturing for crisis talks to reopen the mill.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President, Michele O’Neil:

“The workers at Nippon Paper’s Opal mill have had the back of this company, so much so, that they voluntarily accepted a 5 percent pay cut to keep the mill financially viable in 2016. No managers took a pay cut.

“Now Nippon Paper Opal should have their workers’ backs. Instead of locking them out in an aggressive abuse of power, they should be sitting down with their loyal, skilled, long-term workforce to settle a new fair enterprise agreement.

“The paper mill is the biggest employer in the Latrobe Valley and the jobs at the mill keep local businesses and communities going. Every local school has kids turning up whose parents are not bringing in any wages. Not because their parents are on strike but because they have been locked out of the workplace.

“This is bullying on the part of Nippon Paper Opal and completely out of proportion with workers exercising their legal right to bargain for the first time in two decades.

“Nippon Paper Opal has deep pockets, but instead of reaching a fair deal, have adopted a strategy designed to starve mill workers into accepting severe cuts to pay and conditions so they can go back to work.

“Nippon Paper executives in Japan seem to fail to grasp the gravity of the hardship being caused. This is not a game; workers, families and Latrobe Valley towns need these 300 jobs and Nippon Paper Opal needs to end this flagrant abuse of power.

Quotes attributable to CFMEU Pulp & Paper Secretary, President Denise Campbell-Burns:

"Members at Nippon Paper's Opal mill are standing strong and won't be bullied into taking a pay cut. Their bills haven't been cut—groceries, petrol, and mortgage repayments keep rising—why should their wages go backwards?"

"This isn't just about the 308 workers locked out of their jobs – it's about the entire Latrobe Valley. Every local business, every family, every community that relies on this mill is being punished because a handful of executives won't come to the table and negotiate in good faith."

"Nippon Paper Opal's lockout is an attack on workers, an attack on families, and an attack on the Latrobe Valley. This company is showing complete disregard for the people who keep its operations running."

"If executives in Japan think Australian workers will roll over and accept pay cuts, they've got another thing coming. We don't accept bullying, we don't accept intimidation, and we won't accept a deal that leaves workers worse off."

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