

Wednesday, 17 August 2011

Qantas management must guarantee to Australian workers their jobs will not head offshore

Qantas management must urgently explain to its 30,000 Australian workers the reasons why it is necessary to sack 1000 workers, and give a rock solid guarantee the establishment of a new Asian based airline is not the beginning of a long-term plan to offshore, say unions.

Speaking after an urgent phone hook-up of all Qantas unions this morning, ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said Qantas CEO Alan Joyce must sit down with unions to talk through the issues.

“Qantas workers were informed yesterday, through the media, that 1000 of their colleagues would be laid off and Qantas’ future focus would be on Asia,” Mr Lawrence said.

“It is only a small step from setting up a new airline in Asia to begin basing more and more of the operations – whether that be maintenance, pilots, flight crews, call centres or others – overseas.

“Australians do not want to see Qantas jobs go down the path of a race to the bottom that would see a large section of its workforce employed on the pay and conditions of developing countries.

“Qantas must provide a guarantee that yesterday’s announcement is not the start of a long-term plan to send its operations offshore.”

Judging by media comments from customers, including talkback radio this morning, Qantas management has done enormous damage to the airline’s brand and reputation with yesterday’s announcement.

“Qantas customers want to see the airline employ Australian workers,” Mr Lawrence said.

“They are prepared to pay a premium for the world-class service that Qantas has – until now – provided, because they know it is dedicated, professional, and highly-skilled Australian workers who deliver on that reputation for safety, reliability and service. Qantas management has shown callous disregard for the loyalty of its workforce – and its customers.”

Industrial action

There has been much media speculation over the past 24 hours about the potential for industrial action at Qantas.

Mr Lawrence said any upcoming industrial action at Qantas would be part of collective bargaining for enterprise agreements covering significant parts of the workforce. This is a separate issue to the announcement yesterday.

“Negotiations for new pay deals covering pilots, baggage handlers, ground staff, store workers and engineers have been underway for some time,” Mr Lawrence said. “Due to a lack of willingness from Qantas to negotiate, some unions are contemplating taking protected industrial action under the Fair Work Act.

“While job security is a key concern for all workers, these negotiations and any potential industrial action are a totally separate issue. But it is true to say that Qantas’ decision to make this announcement at this time has further inflamed tensions.”

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