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ACTU slams multinational's lockout of regional workers

Australian Unions are calling on one of Australia's largest paper and packaging companies to end their indefinite lockout of over 300 workers without pay at the Maryville paper mill in Victoria's Latrobe Valley.

Opal Australian Paper, owned by Japanese multinational company Nippon, took the extraordinarily harsh action in response to seven workers taking one stop work action, the first of any action in over 20 years.

The Maryville mill is one of the Latrobe Valley's largest employers, responsible for manufacturing brown paper and board to supply Opal's packaging division.

Opal issued the lockout notice prior to the change of shift at the mill, denying work and stopping the pay to more than 300 pulp and paper production employees at 6pm, on 16 January.

The CFMEU Manufacturing Division members have been bargaining with the company since October 2024, with negotiations stalling over Opal's demands to reduce wages and working conditions of their workforce.

The union members supported the Maryvale mill during difficult periods, including in 2016, when the workers agreed to a 5 per cent pay cut and a resetting of wages to secure the future of the mill.

The company's management is now seeking to take away a raft of workplace rights and pay.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary, Sally McManus:

"Locking out more than 300 workers indefinitely without pay is unfair and unreasonable. It hurts these workers, their families and the whole community. The union movement calls on Opal to end this disproportionate action and negotiate a fair deal with their Maryvale mill workers.

"When a multinational attempts to crush a workforce and a community, the union movement of Australia will respond. We know these workers made personal sacrifices to keep the paper mill moving during difficult times, and now they are being punished by the company for simply wanting their wages and conditions to be protected.

"Working people across Australia are fed up with this sort of corporate greed. If Opal continues down this track, they will further damage their reputation and erode public trust.

"The union movement is committed to supporting these workers until this situation is resolved."

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