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Australian Tribunal Ends Qantas Lockout

Brussels, 31 october 2011 (ITUC OnLine): National industrial tribunal Fair Work Australia has intervened to end the global employee-lockout by QANTAS Airways, following the sudden decision by CEO Alan Joyce to ground the airline's whole fleet on Saturday. Unions at QANTAS have been pressing for guarantees on job security and wages as the company, heading for a A\$500 million profit in 2011, looks cut labour costs including through outsourcing.

"The decision to ground the airline without notice was bizarre and extremely damaging to the company's reputation and the country's economy. It is fortunate that Australia has an industrial relations tribunal with sufficient power to reverse that decision, and force the company into proper talks with the unions representing its workforce," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow. The tribunal ruling means the company and the unions have an initial 21 days to negotiate an agreement on the issues in dispute. If no settlement is reached, Fair Work Australia would then launch a compulsory arbitration process.

"QANTAS has so far refused to enter genuine negotiations while the feeling of insecurity within its workforce continues to grow. The management must now negotiate in good faith, and address the legitimate concerns of its employees instead of focusing only on generating instant super-profits for its big shareholders," said Burrow.

The largest shareholder in QANTAS, with more than 20% of the shares, is US banking giant JP Morgan. Having received a US\$25bn taxpayer bailout in 2008, JP Morgan remains a leading player in global financial speculation. Through its membership of the US "Financial Services Roundtable", it has been a key contributor to corporate lobbying against improved union rights for American workers.

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 308 affiliated national organisations from 153 countries and territories.

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