

Paul Bastian, AMWU National Secretary



STRIKE CLIPS DEFENCE WINGS

Defence Department technicians have walked off the job for the first time as they campaign for a new collective agreement.

Union members at two RAAF air bases, the Navy's main airfield and a weapons facility in NSW are set to repeat their 24-hour strike on Monday week in solidarity with other Defence public servants resisting the Coalition Government's attack on their pay and conditions.

Strategic strikes and bans have hit aviation maintenance, military research and weapons facilities across Australia.

The latest action was taken by four maintenance managers in aircraft operations at RAAF Richmond, RAAF Williamtown, HMAS Albatross at Nowra and in training at the defence facility at Orchard Hills, NSW.

Their "surgical" strike action came with five days notice, aimed at disrupting defence administration in covering their work but without risking safety.

Jon Laird, AMWU delegate at HMAS Albatross, said strikes and bans hitting maintenance on Air Traffic Control equipment and aircraft radios would escalate unless Defence management gave the Turnbull Government a reality check by sticking up for its civilian workforce. "We're told it's 'one-team' and 'one-Defence' combining civilian and uniform for Australia's security but then the Government comes in over the top and



Deserving respect: AMWU delegate Jon Laird, who services air traffic control equipment in the control tower at navy aviation base HMAS Albatross, said Defence public servants wanted proper respect and recognition.

treats the public service like dirt, undermining trust and destroying morale," he said. The Defence Department is offering an effective 1.2 per cent per year pay increase to the civilian workforce that has had no pay increase since 2014. No backpay is on offer.

AMWU Assistant National Secretary Mike Nicolaides described the offer as "totally inadequate."

The other major issue was the Turnbull Government's agenda to convert much of the existing collective agreement into departmental policy, controlled at management's discretion.

It would mean the criteria for areas including performance pay and job classifications could be varied at will by Defence

management or their Minister, rather than negotiated with the union every three years.

That risked higher workloads and responsibility being loaded on to existing pay rates or unrealistic targets being set for assessments of performance.

"Our members don't trust the Minister responsible for the Public Service, Michealia Cash, having control over their conditions any more than they trusted Eric Abetz before he was sacked," Mr Nicolaides said.

"The Turnbull Government is imposing an inflexible bargaining framework across the public service, which puts the Defence officials we're talking with in a straightjacket – they're frozen at attention and won't move without permission." ■



UNION NEWS

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INTERNS HELP UNION SPEAK TO ALL PEOPLE

The new year has brought fresh faces to the AMWU's Victorian office as we welcome two multi-lingual young activists aiming to help our union speak all workers' languages.

Ms Azita Arian and Mr Dawn Poulose are our summer interns for 2016, and will be spending the coming three weeks with our organisers and specialist staff seeing how the AMWU operates.

State Secretary Steve Dargavel this week welcomed the duo, whom he carefully selected from many candidates interviewed through the Victorian Trades Hall Council's intern program.

"It's refreshing to see the enthusiasm of Azita and Dawn, caring young people with the passion for unionism as a positive force for good," he said.

Mr Dargavel said they represented the community diversity so integral to the AMWU's present membership and future.

Ms Arian, whose family came from Iran as refugees when she was a small child, is a para legal with a leading Melbourne law firm who is completing a law-commerce degree (including industrial law) at Deakin University.

"I'm grateful to be bi-lingual and have the exposure to another culture, I think it can help you to become a well-rounded person," said Ms Arian, who also speaks the Persian language of Farsi. Mr Poulose, a business and psychology student at Victoria University, comes from the Indian state of Kerala and fluently speaks English, Tamil, Hindi and his local language of Malayalam.

He is living in Ballarat and has already enjoyed getting involved with the local community, helping organise an Indian cultural festival.

Ms Arian and Mr Poulose said it was only through university that they learned of the importance of unions for advancing decent work conditions, which they are concerned that most young people have very little idea about.

"I didn't know what unions had done for communities in different parts of the world, you wrongly assume that Governments have handed us decent conditions at work," Mr Poulose said.

On their first day they were briefed by Mr Dargavel and excited to experience union solidarity in action at a Maritime



In good company: AMWU interns Dawn Poulose (right, standing) and Azita Arian (front) at a union rally this week with ACTU President Ged Kearney (left), AMWU President Andrew Dettmer and AMWU Education Co-ordinator George Koletsis.

Union rally for the seafarers from Alcoa's ship Portland.

Both hope working with the AMWU might assist them to develop new ideas on informing more young people about workplace rights and recruiting them as union members, via social media or by improving the way employee inductions happen. ■

EARLY FINISH A GAS FOR AIR LIQUIDE MEMBERS

Persistence has paid off for a small group of AMWU members in Adelaide who successfully overcame an employer bid to fund a pay rise by winding back their break time.

Nine members at multinational gas giant Air Liquide stuck with overtime bans for almost a year until management agreed to a compromise proposed by the AMWU, which saw them secure a new enterprise deal with total break time intact.

Delegate Joe Pelin said break time during the day was important for safety, as members are required to concentrate intensely on what is often hazardous work filling cyclinders with oxygen, nitrogen, argon, CO₂ and acetylene.

In late 2014, the company had made the first year's 2.75 per cent pay rise of their new agreement dependent on the workers giving up their 10-minute afternoon tea break.

But after the company refused to look at compromises the workers responded



Vindicated: Air Liquide workers protesting in 2015 during their successful campaign against the company's demand they trade off break time for a pay rise.

with overtime bans, 24-hour strikes and a demonstration outside the company's plant at Elizabeth South.

Mr Pelin said management was finally forced to compromise with a deal struck that would allow workers to leave work 10 minutes earlier in lieu of the afternoon tea break. "The new arrangement is now in place and it's working well. I think the industrial action was justified and we're happy," Mr Pelin said

"All of us agreed to stick together and because of that, in the end there was an outcome for us."

The workers received their pay rises late last year, with backpay, after Mr Pelin led negotiations with Roy Pane (AMWU Bargaining Rep) and organiser Stuart Gordon.

Mr Gordon praised the "unity and stamina" shown by each member for the successful outcome in a protracted and difficult process. ■



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