

Special Signal

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1. Telstra HR – Longing For The return Of The Howard Era

■ **Contact a CEPU Official:**

LEN COOPER
Branch Secretary
0438 389 302

JOHN ELLERY
Assist Secretary
0419 823 580

WOODY
Member Service Off
Ph. 9349 4411

SUE RILEY
CSO Call Centres
0439 762 455

GREG CABANOS
CSO – Contractors
0415 154 352

COMMUNICATIONS UNION (CEPU)

Telecommunications And
Services Branch Victoria

1/139 Queensberry Street
Carlton South 3053

Ph: 03 9349 4411

Fx: 03 9349 3488

Email

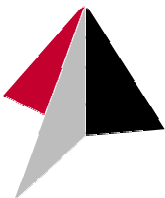
cdtsvic@victs.cepu.asn.au

Clayton Office

47 Henderson Rd
Clayton 3168

Ph: 03 9545 1503/ 9545 1516

Fx: 03 9561 5599



TELSTRA HR – LONGING FOR THE RETURN OF THE HOWARD ERA

Andrea Grant, Group Managing Director, Human Resources Telstra has distributed a circular purporting to be a message about the current EBA talks between the CEPU, other unions and Telstra HR. Unfortunately her message has now been picked up by Mick Rocca.

THE SO-CALLED SIDE AGREEMENT

The unions and the ACTU have been putting to Telstra that as well as requiring a good EBA, Telstra employees also require a constructive businesslike relationship between Telstra and the union. Something that has been missing for years

At the EBA talks the unions, as well as providing Telstra HR with our research and arguments supporting our claims on behalf of staff, on issues like:

- retaining all current conditions, including the redundancy agreement
- ensuring the right of all current AWA employees to move to the award/EBA without disadvantage
- a decent wage increase
- a decent performance management system that can't be dishonestly manipulated by Telstra management
- a decent dispute settling clause which enables employees to go to arbitration to seek fair treatment as appropriate etc,

we also put before them a document which made concrete claims for a better working relationship.

This included suggestions such as making it easier for members and other staff to contact unions for support, providing new staff with access to unions for information, providing union workplace representatives with some rights to assist local employees etc.

The fact that HR sees these simple, reasonable, commonsense requests as being about “union power” exposes very clearly that HR's thinking is a “throw back” to Howard's era. You may remember that every second word from the Howard Government and its Ministers warned of the “bogey” of “union power”.

THE LAW OR NOT THE LAW

HR also makes the bold claim that some of the union requirements were contrary to the current workplace laws. We have disputed this with them previously, and in order to clear up any difficulties we offered to represent the issues to Deputy Prime Minister and Workplace Relations Minister Julia Gillard for clarification and we said we would not proceed with any issue that was contrary to the law.

You know what? Telstra HR department were not interested in our offer! Worse, when asked would they agree if it was demonstrated that it complied with the law, they said they wouldn't be interested.

A WAY FORWARD? NOT LIKELY!

Perhaps the biggest laugh of all is HR's claim that Telstra has proposed “a way forward” to unions that preserve all conditions of employment for Telstra employees such as existing redundancy pay, grandfathering, hours, personal and annual leave, parental leave, penalties and allowances.

Let us clear up this nonsense too. Firstly Telstra HR has put lots of rhetoric, lots of magic lantern shows, and lots of double talk at the “negotiations”, but has given the unions nothing in writing


your rights at work
worth fighting for

They promised us a written document but failed to deliver – so in effect they have offered nothing, just a lot of contradictory words.

However they have made it clear that if we want to secure those fundamental things for employees, (that HR claims they have offered), there is a big price for employees to pay in trade-offs and minimal pay increases. Why is HR only giving employees half the story?

BIGGEST NONSENSE OF ALL

Probably the biggest nonsense of all is that HR claims they are keen to continue talks and reach agreement! When the unions put proposals for nearly a week of concentrated talks for the 17th to 21st June, or a set of dates when next to meet. Telstra either refused or failed to respond.

UNION SUPPORT FOR TELSTRA'S NBN BID

On the NBN bid we advised the company the unions had supported Telstra on this issue and many others over decades. Telstra's response to that support had been to slash more than 50,000 jobs.

We even put a detailed plan to the company how we could support Telstra around NBN. We however reminded Telstra, that it was they who had stated to us during the talks "nothing for nothing". We asked Telstra to guarantee ongoing good wages and conditions for the employees and guarantees on jobs around the NBN.

We asked Telstra how many jobs would be outsourced etc. Telstra has unfortunately not been forthcoming on these issues. We can no longer agree to unconditional support for Telstra.

If Telstra does not win the NBN contract it will be because of their arrogance and their loss of many friends and allies in this political area, in business and the community.

UNIONS' POSITION IS SIMPLE AND STRAIGHTFORWARD

On the unions' part the situation is simple, as we have been reporting in our circulars. We want to secure an EBA that protects all current conditions, including the redundancy agreement and the range of other issues listed earlier. We also want some concrete provisions that ensure a more constructive relationship, with fairer treatment of staff, into the future.

Telstra HR knows this; it has been put to them in a variety of ways, in writing and otherwise.

THE REAL AGENDA?

This latest rush into print by HR seems to be an attempt to divert attention from HR's real agenda, and that is to try to make sure that Telstra's HR department doesn't have to depart from its ideological fixation with de-unionising Telstra, à la John Howard, in order to be free to play "merry hell" with Telstra employee conditions and wages in the future.

IMPORTANT LESSON HERE

There is a really important lesson to learn here for HR and the higher managers they report to.

If Telstra does not have the co-operation and support from employees and their unions, particularly in this period of the rollout of FTTN, the company is in trouble, big trouble.

You would wonder why Telstra's Corporate Managers; the business hardheads so to speak, are tolerating this childish nonsense from their HR department, wouldn't you?

CEPU AND THE EBA NEGOTIATIONS

We have put to Telstra many times, and we repeat:

- * We obviously do not require and have not required, anything illegal in the EBA or any agreement, nor would we.
- * We stand ready to talk about finalising a good quality EBA at any time.
- * We are completely comfortable to have the principles contained in our better working relationship proposal included in the EBA and not as a so-called "side agreement".

Given that, what excuse has Telstra HR department got now to explain their refusal to meet?

If you want to see the MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) please go to the website: www.rightsatwork.com.au/campaigns/telstra

LEN COOPER
Branch Secretary