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■ **Contact a CEPU Official:**

LEN COOPER
Branch Secretary
0438 389 302

JOHN ELLERY
Assist Secretary
0419 823 580

SUE RILEY
CSO Call Centres
0439 762 455

**COMMUNICATIONS
UNION (CEPU)**

Main Office

1/139 Queensberry Street
Carlton South 3053

Ph: 03 9349 4411

Fax : 03 9349 3488

Email

cdtsvic@victs.cepu.asn.au

Clayton Office

47 Henderson Rd
Clayton 3168

Ph: 03 9545 1503

Fax: 03 9561 5599

DISCUSSIONS WITH TELSTRA - EBA

Further discussions regarding the EBA took place with Telstra on Monday 12th April.

At the unions initiative the stalled negotiations began again on the 5th March at which the unions advanced a framework for dealing with the “gap” in telstra’s offer between the pay of EBA employees as compared to the ECA pay rates.

Telstra’s negotiators undertook to take the suggestions back to telstra’s decision makers for consideration.

The parties met again on the 17th March and Telstra tabled its latest offer of 2% + 2% +2%+2% over the next 2 years. Telstra declared that this was its final offer and therefore it was basically “take it or leave it”.

The offer doesn’t resolve the differences between the EBA rate and the ECA rate.

At the discussions on the 12th April the unions put views/questions to Telstra which could be summarised as follows:

- It was the unions view that the overwhelming majority of members were opposed to telstra’s latest offer and would most likely continue to reject it.
- The unions asked Telstra whether they had any plans to close the gap between the wage rates for EBA employees and those paid to ECA employees, at any time in the future.
- The unions again reiterated that the pay offer was discriminatory with regard to EBA employees.

Telstra on its part refused to move from its latest offer and in fact declared it had no plans to close the pay gap and had not thought about solving the problem.

The CEPU is currently considering seeking the views of its members in a postal ballot, amongst other options.

HOW MUCH IS IT WORTH?

From discussions, Telstra clearly believes that the improvements in the EBA, arising from the negotiations with the union, should be paid for by the EBA employees.

In part, they justify the pay discrepancies between the ECA & EBA by pointing to the fact that the EBA is superior to the ECA in a number of ways.

What are the actual improvements in the EBA negotiated so far?

The Redundancy Agreement

The redundancy provisions in the EBA (whilst the pay-out entitlements are the same) would be improved in terms of swaps and volunteers and in terms of more transparent rating and ranking procedures. However, it must be pointed out that changes to administrative procedures and processes would in fact save Telstra on current costs.

Thus, the improvements in the redundancy provisions have already been paid for.

Part A/Part B Modification

All new starters for the Customer Field Workforce (CFW) and the Technical Workforce (TW) would be employed on the agreed EBA banding system and pay rates.

In these two workstreams (CFW & TW), employees coming off of their AWAs have the right to move to the EBA banding system and pay rates.



As part of this compromise however, all new starters for the rest of the company, will go onto telstras' non-negotiated pay and banding system and therefore you could say there is as much, or even more, in this compromise for Telstra.

Dispute Settling & Arbitration

Dispute settling procedures would be improved in the following ways:

- Telstra would drop its insistence on individual employee's disputes being handled through the internal resolution processes.
- Telstra would agree to compulsory conciliation in Fair Work Australia.
- Telstra would agree to clauses enabling employees and the union to access arbitration (Fair Work Australia) in the event that disputes cannot be settled by negotiation.

Wouldn't you think that this was an automatic right for workers in a democracy and especially in Australia, given the history of Arbitration?

Performance

Quarterly consultation with the union to monitor the performance systems in Telstra.

Essential Customer Servicing

These rates will be increased by 10%. They haven't been increased for a decade or more and only effect a few employees. By the way the 10% increase is unlikely to cover the increases in cost of living over the life of the agreement.

How Much Should You Pay For These Improvements?

Leaving aside the principle of whether you should pay for these

improvements in any event, and just to play telstra's little game for the moment.

Earlier information we circulated showed that if telstra's pay offer was picked up, just by example a Band 4 would :

- At the end of the agreement period be \$1420 per annum behind a Band 4 in the ECA.
- Over the life of the agreement be paid \$9628 less than a Band 4 on the ECA.

None of the above takes account of the further losses in superannuation, penalty rates etc.

Are the above losses a "fair" price to pay for the potential improvements in the EBA?

Who decides what price EBA employees should pay for these improvements?

Why isn't this "price" something that is negotiated during the so-called good faith bargaining process, instead of the "take it or leave it" approach by Telstra?

Ask your manager (many of whom like to have lots to say on the EBA "offer") their views about those issues.

UNPAID OVERTIME: TELSTRA COUGHS UP

Some Telstra employees at the Burwood customer service centre in Victoria have recently received a pleasant surprise – payment for overtime worked years ago.

No formal explanation of the reason for the payment – or for delay in making it – has been offered by Telstra. But clearly it represents a response to the campaign initiated by the CEPU last September to address the company's practice of squeezing unpaid work out of its call centre employees.

Last year, CEPU members at Burwood reported that employees regularly worked unpaid overtime after the end of their shifts to complete the handling of customer requests. The union took the issue to Fair Work Australia and sought access to Telstra's employee records to establish the facts of the matter.

Now, without the case even having gone to court, it appears Telstra is in damage control mode. Payments for overtime worked four years ago have started to appear on employees' payslips.

And this trickle threatens to become a flood. The union estimates that over the six years since these practices were introduced Telstra has underpaid its Burwood employees by millions of dollars.

With Telstra management silent on the issue, it is too soon to know how extensive this pay "re-adjustment" will be. Potentially, however, it could involve compensating a much larger number of employees than those who work at Burwood.

MORE MEMBERS, MORE BENEFITS

It's straight-forward logic: the more union members that exist in a workplace, the stronger the voice we all have in getting better wages and conditions.

Your Union is determined to lift the level of membership we have in our traditional areas such as Telstra and Optus. We're also looking at "green-fields" too – new companies in our areas of coverage, where employees want the help of a union in their workplace.

We've boosted the focus on recruitment by bringing on board new union employees whose job is to concentrate on recruiting.

We're also bringing in such union staff through a terrific new association we have set up with a professional recruitment services firm WorkPartners, who have helped other unions and non-government organisations like Greenpeace grow their membership base.

Our recruitment teams get sent to specific workplaces, identified for their potential to pump up union membership and strengthen the overall presence of the union.

We want to let you know that our work with WorkPartners is just one step we have taken to keep the union strong through active membership. You can read more at www.cepconnects.org

TELSTRA PIT REMEDIAION PROGRAMME RAISES OHS ISSUES

The CEPU has written to Telstra raising concerns about the potential exposure of Telstra employees and contractors working on the company's pit remediation programme.

There is still a large amount of asbestos in and around these pits and its removal must only be carried out by workers who have the skills and knowledge to perform the work safely.

CEPU members have advised the union that they believe contracting companies chosen to work on the programme have been using untrained workers. If this is the case, both the contractors and Telstra would be in breach of their OHS responsibilities.

The CEPU has asked for an investigation into the claims to ensure that all workers involved in the programme are properly trained.

NBN TRIAL SITES ANNOUNCED

The Federal Government has announced five mainland trial sites for the National Broadband Network (NBN) and a Stage 3 extension of the Tasmanian NBN roll-out to a further 90,000 premises in major urban centres.

According to NBN Co, the mainland sites election promises have been selected to provide a representative mix of differing climates, housing setups and geographical conditions.

They include part of Brunswick, an inner-city Melbourne suburb; a chunk of Townsville's western suburbs; an area of west Armidale in NSW that includes the University of New England; Minnamurra and Kiama Downs, two coastal communities south of Wollongong; and the rural town of Willunga, South Australia.

It appears deployment in all these areas is likely to be aerial, NBN Co not yet having reached agreement with Telstra about the use of its ducts for the roll-out. Communications Minister Conroy has suggested that he did not anticipate any problems in this regard, except perhaps from individuals.

But at least one Council (Moreland) in the trial areas has a policy of undergrounding all services infrastructure, suggesting that the trials may end up being as much a test of the community's political tolerance as they are of NBN technologies.

LEN COOPER Branch Secretary

CEPU MEMBER SERVICES

Taxation and Financial:
**PROACT ADVSR & ACCTS
SILVIO CRISAFI
9880 9600**

Financial
**BILL HARDING & ASSOC
9738 1244**

Legal
**RYAN CARLISLE THOMAS
1300 366 006**

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