



Telstra Workers Under the Hammer

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Workers want unions to look after their wages

Workers do want their unions to look after their wages and conditions, if the results from the April workplace agreement ballots in Telstra are any sort of guide.

In the management run ballot for more than 10,000 of its employees, the normally conservative staff in Business Support and Technical Support overwhelmingly told Telstra that they weren't interested in management's pay offer. The vote was as high as 2 to 1 against.

Ian McCarthy responded to the Union's victory in the ballot - the second in the last few months - with the news that unions were gaining support from workers not normally noted for their unionism.

"This wasn't a ballot of shopfloor, militant workers but

BY DALE KEELING

included a very great number of administrative, managerial and professional staff some of whom are not in a union at all. Nonetheless the

Union's wide campaign for a No vote was listened to and heeded. Management wanted to cut salaries and people, regardless of their position in the Corporation, yet people need their income to meet their responsibilities and debts," he said.

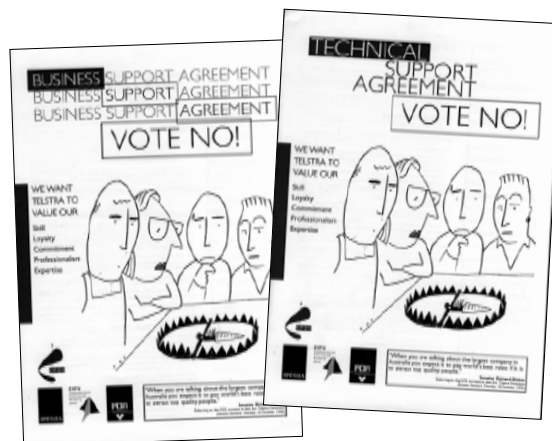
The ballot arose from Telstra management's decision earlier this year to abruptly withdraw from enterprise bargaining talks with Telstra's unions. In a re-run of a similar ballot held last year amongst Customer Contact staff,

management decided to make a direct offer to employees which involved the carrot of a vaguely worded 2% pay rise (with some more and some less) but very extended pay freezes further down the track although some employees would escape this. The pay freeze was to be accompanied by reductions in superannuation benefits.

Telstra was banking on the carrot rather than the stick.

But in a repeat of last year's ballot, employees decisively turned the proposals down, particularly in Business Support where the result went against Telstra management by 2 to 1. Reports from various workcentres suggests that many contracted staff, senior managerial and admin people voted against Telstra.

Senior management's response so far has been to adopt the ostrich position arguing that the workers turned down the concept of an agreement rather than a very poor agreement and hence they aren't going to talk to anyone. Quite the reverse position should now be recognised - Telstra have tried an unpopular tactic which failed miserably, so we should all now get back on track and start talking. The Unions believe that they have a very strong mandate from the workforce to now pursue a negotiated EBA.



RESULTS OF BSW AND TSW BALLOT

BUSINESS SUPPORT

Ballots posted	5,082
Ballots returned	3,683
Percentage returned	73.9%
For	1,278 (34.8%)
Against	2,399 (65.2%)
Informal	6

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Ballots posted	5,153
Ballots returned	3,927
Percentage returned	77%
For	1,674 (42.6%)
Against	2,250 (57.4%)
Informal	3

Official figures supplied by Telstra

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CEPU marches on May Day



Members and officials of the CEPU joined thousands of fellow trade unionists on May 7 to march through Sydney on the traditional day of international worker solidarity.

Not surprisingly the themes taken up by the various and colourful union contingents focused on concerns about worker freedoms overseas as well as the economic policies of the Howard Government, particularly the GST. CEPU members let known their feeling about the Government's treatment of Telstra.

The overseas issue that gained most attention was a strike in South Korea by the country's hundreds of thousands of auto assembly plant workers. In addition to the trade union groups, the march was notable for the number of migrant worker organisations representing such communities as the Cypriots, Greeks, Cubans and Kurds.

May Day, Sydney 2000



Telstra to pursue NDC sale despite problems

BY GUY ROBINS
ASSISTANT SECRETARY

Despite the failure of contractors to meet workmanship and financial standards, Telstra appears set to privatise NDC. Interestingly this policy is being pursued at a time when the Corporation is losing investor credibility in its plans for buying other companies.

The NDC sale is nothing new and had already been announced last year. The Union believes it will still be some time before Telstra would be in a position to sell NDC as there are too many things that would prevent NDC from being a

stand alone company. The Union is very much opposed to the sale, as we believe it is a strategic part of Telstra's business. We have seen how Telstra have encouraged contractors to take over different sections of their business, as they are now encouraging contractors to compete against NDC. The contractors then overcharge them and do not give proper service. One good example of this is the cleaning of Telephone Exchanges. Telstra introduced contractors to do the Exchange cleaning at a cheap price,

and what did they get? A cheap job that often leaves the Telephone Exchanges in a terrible state of cleanliness. Telstra have also found that contractors have not delivered the same standard of workmanship. Contractors were recently used to renew major sections of the customer access network (customer cabling) in Sydney. Unfortunately this did not work out either, as the companies ran way over budget, and Telstra has since cancelled a number of these contracts.

The decision to sell NDC will be made by the board of Telstra in consultation with the Government (Government owns 51%). Members should understand, the Telstra Board, or this Government will not consult the Union with regards to the sale of NDC. However, the Union has made its position absolutely clear to Telstra and the current Government, that we totally oppose the sale of NDC.

Many members have indicated concern as to what their pay and conditions may be if NDC is sold. The Union has legal advice that if NDC is sold, it would have to be a transfer of business, and the entire award and EBA conditions must be transferred with the workers to the new owners of the company, whoever they may be. It should also be noted this would include the special arrangement for superannuation arising from the transfer of employees to NDC Limited back in April 1999. The Union is aware of these issues and has legal counsel ready to defend these conditions the moment they are threatened.

NDC 4% pay rise in place

by Guy Robins, Assistant Secretary

The Union's NDC members received their second 4% pay rise from May 10 arising from the current Enterprise Agreement.

The CEPU will be negotiating a new enterprise agreement with NDC in the coming months. The current agreement runs out in December and the Union is working on a proposal for these negotiations. It is intended that work centre visits will be conducted to discuss with members their requirements for the next EBA.

NEW NDC PAY RATES	Band	Annual salary
	12	\$79,123
	11	\$72,457
	10	\$67,080
	9	\$63,544
	8	\$58,502
	7	\$52,312
	6	\$50,180
	5	\$48,048
	4	\$42,536
	3	\$39,156
	2	\$36,296
	1	\$30,056

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Telstra unions win key redundancy case

The CEPU has won a major victory in its long-running battle with Telstra over redundancy conditions.

In a key decision which will affect the thousands of Telstra employees now facing redundancy, the Federal Court dismissed Telstra's application to overturn an earlier decision of the Industrial Relations Commission relating to the 1993 Telstra Redundancy Agreement.

The Full Bench of the AIRC had previously found that it did not have the ability to vary that agreement in line with applications that had been made by Telstra.

Colin Cooper, President of the CEPU Communications Division, said that the variations sought by Telstra would have allowed management to pick and choose over which employees left the com-

pany in a situation where thousands of jobs were being slashed.

"Telstra has now spent hundreds of thousands of its shareholders' dollars over the last four years, pursuing what it essentially an ideological agenda," Mr Cooper said.

"In the past, when management wanted to reduce staff numbers quickly, they simply sought volunteers in accordance with the Agreement.

"This wasn't good enough for Telstra's current management. The corporate ideologues demanded the ability to target specific workers for redundancy and to make people involuntarily redundant, without having regard to the checks and balances contained in the present, fair Agreement.

"Their preferred process -

known as Resource Rebalancing in the new corporate-speak - has been designed to allow management to effectively intimidate the workforce through this threat."

Mr Cooper said that the CEPU would be vigilant in monitoring Telstra's compliance with the Agreement and would take whatever action was necessary to ensure that fair and reasonable processes applied to any employees made redundant as a result of the latest job cuts announcement.



Telstra to 'optimise' call centres

BY VIVETTE HORREX

Despite the fact that Telstra announced staff cuts some months ago few details have emerged since.

Some commentators have speculated that Telstra's silence is a result of the barrage of adverse media and political attention it received as a result of CEO Ziggy Switkowski's job cuts announcements.

The announcements, clearly intended as a boost to the ailing Telstra share price - and obviously a failure - included reference to the rationalisation of call centres within the organisation.

The CEPU has been pressing Telstra for details of their plans for call centres and has been told that the company is embarking upon a review called the Call Centre

Optimisation Project. We believe that this is Telstra-speak for a rationalisation of call centres which will impact upon operators and sales and billing staff and is linked with the early May signing of agreements with Stellar.

The Union believes that Stellar, a joint venture company owned by Telstra and Excell Pty Ltd, will begin to perform work on behalf of Telstra at the expense of jobs within Telstra call centres.

Telstra seem unconcerned at the rising anxiety of staff as they string out the public announcements on call centre closures. Obviously Telstra are sensitive to any more public scrutiny and are leaving their announcements to the last possible moment so that there is

little time for politicians, community leaders and unions to respond.

One area that is particularly concerned is the Conferlink centres of which there are three with rumours that this will be reduced to two centres in the near future. Despite inquires from the Union Telstra will not divulge their plans in regard to Conferlink and are hiding behind the Call Centre Optimisation Review to avoid letting their staff know anything about their future.

The Union is keeping up the pressure on Telstra as well as briefing federal politicians and community groups on the situation. Regular telephone hookups will be held with workplace delegates throughout this campaign.



JOB CUTS

Telstra shift figures up to 19,500

BY DALE KEELING AND IAN McCARTHY

It is now two months since Telstra executives announced their intention to scrap 16,000 jobs. In that time Telstra's actions have continually dominated media headlines throughout the country, hardly giving CEO Ziggy Switkowski the chance to breathe. Nonetheless it appears that senior executives have been working on a whole host of strategies designed to reduce Telstra's workforce and the wages bill by \$650 million.

Although Telstra have been tight lipped one official comment reported in *The Age* was that the cuts could involve 5,000 jobs being shed through natural attrition, 6,000 employees being offered redundancy packages and 8,500 jobs to be outsourced. That's almost 20,000 jobs.

One strategy has been revealed by the decision to inspect workers' computers at GNOC in Melbourne and suspend, with the view to dismissal, workers for contravening corporate policies on downloading 'inappropriate material' from the Web. It is the Union's view that Telstra prefers such strategies because it removes

from the Corporation the costs and bureaucracy associated with redundancy procedures. The actions have little if anything to do with moral outrage as Union investigations have revealed that many of the targeted members did nothing more than use pictures of family members as screen savers. A week earlier certain managers were informed secretly of the move thereby giving them the chance to remove any doubtful material.

The indications are that Telstra will use any excuse now to dismiss workers without due process. In Bendigo, in early May for instance some 70 employees went on strike and picketed their workplace when a worker was summarily dismissed for taking legitimate sick leave.

Another strategy was revealed during April when documents were leaked that showed that Telstra in-

tended to target low wage pockets in regional Australia in which to concentrate its employees.

Oddly enough it comes at a time when Switkowski has targeted the closure of more call centres, half of which are thought to be in the country. It is thought that the strategy would involve giving staff the option of lower rates on contract or no jobs at all.

Such strategies are extremely unpopular in the country even amongst National MPs (but not Treasurer Peter Costello) who see such policies as attempts to sustain pockets of rural poverty. As Telstra's executives well know, wages in regional Australia are already well below city averages. Often it is the influence of big federal employers with national rates and awards that maintains the level of cash flowing into regions each payday. Telstra is one of those employers.

As far as the Union is concerned the Stellar call centre judgement in the Federal Court made it clear that Telstra can't walk away from its responsibilities as an employer just by outsourcing work to subsidiaries and contractors at lower rates of pay.



Telstra hit; mobiles lose market share

Just 10 days in the life of a Telstra executive ...and they tell us they know how to run Telstra!!

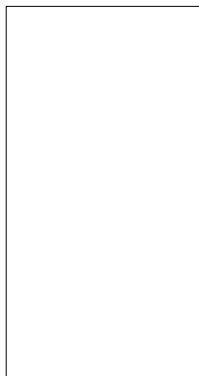
- 11/05 - Telecoms shares battered in price war. - The Age
- 10/05 - Treasurer proposes staggered Telstra sale. - The Age
- 10/05 - Bad news trio hits Telstra to new low. - The Age
- 10/05 - 'Very bad news' puts pressure on Telstra. - AFR
- 09/05 - Buyers aren't hearing Telstra. - The Age
- 09/05 - Workers walk-out at Telstra in Bendigo. - The Age
- 09/05 - Pretty writes end to Solution 6 chapter, steps down from chair. - AFR
- 08/05 - Pretty tough times loom for Ted. - AFR
- 08/05 - Howard rebuked on Telstra blame. - SMH
- 06/05 - Telstra e-play now in tatters. - SMH
- 06/05 - Telstra puts on a brave face as the hits keep coming. - SMH
- 08/05 - Telstra should look to BHP. - SMH
- 06/05 - Ups and downs at T-town; the rise of Ted Pretty. - SMH
- 05/05 - Telstra investors get taste of reality. - The Age
- 05/05 - Telstra plans major revamp. - AFR
- 04/05 - Investors hang up on Telstra. - AFR
- 04/05 - Army of battler-capitalists counts losses. - AFR
- 03/05 - Telstra downgrade sparks shares concerns. - ABC Radio News.
- 03/05 - Telstra mobiles lose market share. - SMH
- 02/05 - Moody's downgrades Telstra senior unsecured rating. - SMH

And all their own work.

Customer Care Teams - another name change!

BY VIVETTE HORREX
ASSISTANT SECRETARY

It's a process that's becoming all too familiar in Telstra these days but no sooner was the ink dry on the formation of Customer Care Teams in Telstra Business Solutions than they have been renamed as Service Delivery Teams. They will service the old Corporate and Government customers with \$1 million and over accounts and will be segmented into seven industry groups.



The first team - Government - commenced on May 8, with recruitment of staff from the Sales/Billing, Teleservice, Mobiles, TCSC Fault Consultants and Technical areas.

The CEPU understands that it will be quite a large centre with over 100 staff once all the industry groups are formed with expected finalisation by July.

One issue of concern for the Union is what happens to the staff left at the Telstra Customer Support Centre (TCSC), and Sales areas, as there still will be a role for them to service the business customers remaining. The CEPU will be requiring assurances from Telstra that they will maintain the staff and service levels required to operate effectively.

The CEPU have been provided with additional information and clarification on a number of outstanding issues raised, however as the teams aren't fully up and running there are still a number

of outstanding issues to be negotiated.

It is our understanding that the current role for TCSC Fault Consultants will primarily remain unchanged when they transfer to the new Service Delivery Teams. There was speculation initially that management might use the opportunity to alter or expand the current roles however this has not proved to be the case. The Union will continue to monitor the situation after the teams are established and if job descriptions and duty statements are changed there will be a new examination to ensure that the current remuneration is applied.

The Centre is located in Liverpool Street in the Sydney CBD, and the operating hours are 8am-5pm, Monday-Friday. The Union will ensure that if these hours are extended then penalty payments would apply.

The Union we be visiting the new centre in the near future.

Telstra stalling on new TA rates

Telstra are playing a petty game over the introduction of the latest TA increases. The yearly review of Travelling and Meal Allowance rates has just been completed for public sector employers, Unions and the ACTU but despite Telstra being represented on the sub committee they have refused to agree to the new rates.

Other employers such as Australia Post have accepted the rates and the CEPU will be pressing Telstra to make a decision shortly. The Travelling Allowance Sub-committee conducts an extensive review of accommodation and meal costs across the nation. The method used to set the rates is so comprehensive the Australian Tax Office uses the outcomes as a basis for their bench marks for allowances.

It is almost unheard of for an employer group, particularly one that has participated in the review, to refuse to accept the rates.

THE NEW RATES ARE WITH INCREASES IN BRACKETS: CAPITAL CITY

Adelaide	\$158.65	(+\$7.85)
Brisbane	\$167.95	(+\$3.85)
Canberra	\$148.65	(+\$1.85)
Darwin	\$170.65	(+\$10.85)
Hobart	\$141.65	(+\$0.85)
Melbourne	\$193.65	(+\$12.85)
Perth	\$163.65	(+\$1.85)
Sydney	\$195.65	(+\$5.85)

The CEPU has written to Telstra asking that they advise the Union whether they intend to adopt the rates as established by the review and the proposed date of effect.

CEPU RETIRED MEMBERS' ASSOCIATION

The Association meets at the Transport Social Club, Regent St, Sydney at 10 am, 4th Thursday in the month except in January, May and December.

Membership currently is \$2 a year or \$20 for Life Membership

We lobby politicians and hold many social events and trips

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CEPU launches anti-harassment campaign

BY VIVETTE HORREX

The CEPU has embarked upon a major campaign aimed at dealing with the issue of harassment in the workplace.

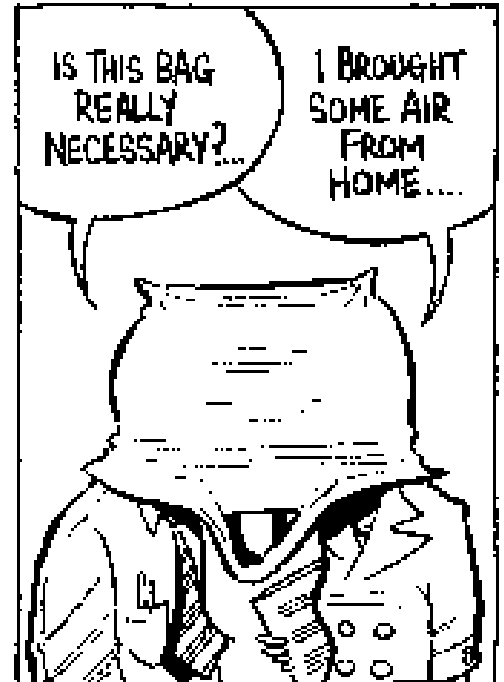
This campaign involves documenting cases of harassment, calling meetings of members to discuss the situation and developing strategies to help members deal with situations which arise in the workplace.

For some time the increasing level of harassment of union members has concerned the CEPU and frankly we are sick of raising the issue with senior management who pretend to be shocked and dismayed and then do nothing about it. The Union has come to the conclusion that many of the instances of workplace harassment and bullying are in fact supported and encouraged by management who see it as part of a wider strategy to soften staff up for redundancy.

This strategy has been particularly successful with morale in the organisation at an all time low and staff regard for their management at rock bottom.

In particular the Union is interested in examples of where Telstra use performance measures to threaten job security. In a recent classic example of stupidity a manager rated an employee as less than satisfactory for achieving above average performance. Supposedly it was assumed that the employee could not have performed the task satisfactorily while achieving the result. It seems you can be too good for your own good!!

The taking of Sick Leave is another area where Telstra are employing a range of tactics to reduce what they term as unplanned absences. Some areas re-



sort to harassment and intimidation even going to the extraordinary length of visiting staff at home, insisting on accompanying staff to the doctor so that they can advise on a return to work strategy. Needless to say many doctors take exception to this type of advice from unqualified individuals. In other areas team leaders and local management are offering to convert Sick Leave to Special Leave so that the sick leave statistics appear acceptable to their superiors. The irony is not lost on other staff who are knocked back on Special Leave to attend to family matters.

Members are encouraged to report instances of harassment to the Union so that we can take action against those responsible. Already the Union has had some success in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in defending members who have been disciplined or dismissed for quite trivial reasons.

The CEPU needs your email address.

Email is the fastest growing form of communication today and within another couple of years will be so common that we'll be left behind if we don't adapt.

The Union is now starting to contact members directly via their email address either at work or at home.

So, if you have an email address please let us know. You can send us an email on ianmc@cepu.asn.au or fax us on (02) 9281 9494. We would prefer that you gave us your home email number.

Management and union consultation works well

Consultation between unionists and management can bring all parties benefits rather than the confrontation so admired these days by senior managers within Telstra.

The CEPU T&S Australia Post Sub Branch has been meeting regularly with Australia Post through the Consultation Committee set up as part of EBA4. The meetings commenced in July last year and have been attended by the CEPU's Sub Branch Executive members and myself.

This forum has allowed the Union to represent and resolve issues directly with management based on direct communication with rank and file members. In turn this co-operation has assisted management with the implementation of FuturePost.

Some achievements from the committee have been:

- A common approach to OH&S in the workplace. The Union negotiated an agreement with management on the DWGs, training of OH&S delegates and the committee structure. At this stage delegates and deputies have been elected at all Designated Work Groups - SELF, SNLF, SWLF Technology and Shift Techs, Hunter, Canberra and SPC.
- The closure of Turella, Seven Hills and Leightonfield was carried out with extensive consultation with the Union. This allowed the smooth transition of business to Strathfield without major industrial disputation.
- The expansion of e-mail access to Technical Officers.
- Improved vending machines at SWLF.
- The promotion of full time Technical Officer positions. Representation of the need for extra Technical officer numbers at SWLF. Continued opposition

to contracting out of Tech work.

- Posting of shift rosters a minimum of 6 months in advance across all centres.
- Advocating further changes to Timeworks' poor transition and inflexibility. It still fails to recognise Tech workers hours. The Union has been successful in achieving Timeworks interrogation down to the local shift level and will continue to raise concerns.

Clearly the consultative approach has been a success. It has promoted a positive relationship and understanding between Union and Management so that all parties will benefit, providing members are keen to participate.

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Branch Committee of Management

Technical Division

Ros Amon, Leon Aroustian, Peter Baker, Allan Brien, Ted Byrnes, Tom Caldwell, Keith Clarke, Kate Cotis, Steve Eggert, Glenn Falls, Peter Hayes, Gerard Kerr, Nick Lavender, Gerald McDermott, Monty McGarr-Kalinowski, Steven Rees, Stuart Rose, Lee Walkington, Jeremy Wheeler and Brian Williams.

Operator Division

Lynn Dunn, Beverly Dwyer, Sue Dwyer, Minette Grocott, Julie Holgate, Graham Maybury, Brenda Mercia, Chris Norman, Shane Ogden and Dale Richards.

On the Line

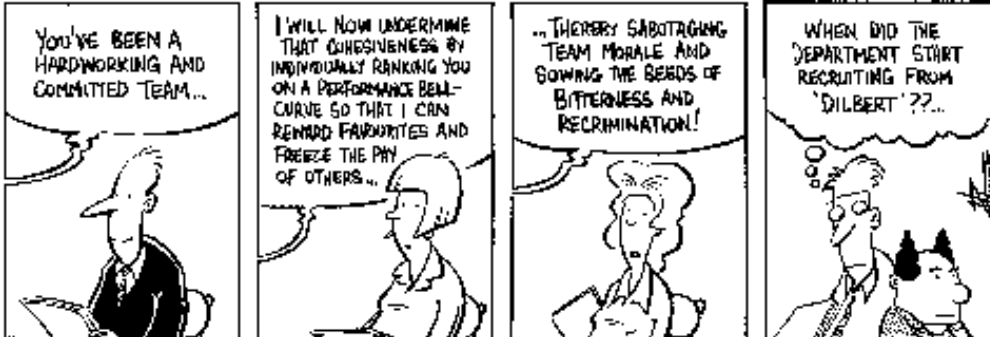
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Budget avoids the concerns of ordinary Australians, says ACTU



ACTU President Sharan Burrow has accused the Federal Government of being unwilling or incapable of dealing with the issues of real concern to the Australian community following the release of the Howard Government's fifth Budget.

"This is not a Budget for the people, it's a Budget designed to prop up an unfair tax that no-one wants," said Ms Burrow.

"The disappointing thing about this Budget is that it acknowledges that many in the community are hurting but does little of substance to address their concerns. There is a lack of vision and leadership on the issues that ordinary Australians

are concerned about – job opportunities and security, health, education, balancing work and family responsibilities and services to regional and remote communities."

Ms Burrow said that the Government's Family and Community initiatives would do little to relieve the pressure that working families were feeling.

For a low paid worker on \$480 a week the tax cuts promised in the Budget amount to just \$12.25 a week and will not even compensate for 6% inflation arising from the GST, tax bracket creep and interest rate rises.

"We are out in the community listening to working people and

they are saying they are being stretched. People are worried about rising interest rates, GST price rises, and the constant struggle to balance the demands of work and family. This budget does little to relieve that pressure.

"The fact that this Government is spending \$360 million advertising a GST that nobody wants, and can only find \$240 million over 4 years to spend on families and communities speaks volumes about its priorities."

Ms Burrow described the Government's \$2 billion apprenticeships pledge as old money that would do little to address critical skill shortages in traditional trades.

"This money was billed as the education budget but with only \$63 million to be spent over 4 years – less than \$1 per Australian per year – this is little more than a joke in an area that is in need of desperate attention.

"Australians must be asking themselves whether this is the best that this Government can do. If the answer is yes, that 'best' is not good enough."

Norwegian strike ends in victory

In a twelve hour overnight bargaining marathon, Norway's workers have secured most of their main demands and have ended their rapidly escalating national strike.

More than 84,000 Norwegian workers had been on strike for almost a week across the private sector (since May 3), following the membership's rejection of a previous mediated settlement offer. The victory came as thousands more workers were due to join the strike, with public sector employees almost certain to join if a result was not forthcoming on May 9. Altogether, more than a

third of Norway's private sector union members were already involved in the strike - reportedly the country's biggest industrial campaign in fifty years.

The new proposed settlement is a big improvement on the previous offer which sparked the strike.

In itself the strike in Norway is not all that remarkable. What is quite extraordinary is that it was called against the wishes of the trade union leadership which had agreed to a proposed settlement with employers. Rank and file workers voted overwhelmingly to reject the pact and forced their leadership to call the strike, a

wonderful example of trade union democracy in action.

The strike is viewed by observers as a rejection of what the head of Norway's unions calls a new 'culture of greed' permeating management in that country something many other workers are experiencing right around the globe. Obscenely high salaries for corporate bosses, tolerated in most advanced industrial countries, conflict with Norway's long-established social democratic culture.

Compiled from Labour-Start reports on www.labourstart.org

Telstra sale planned after next election

BY IAN McCARTHY

The Howard Government appears determined to face the Australian electorate head on over the issue of selling off its controlling shares in Telstra.

The Budget Papers have revealed that the next sale of the Government's Telstra stake is tentatively scheduled for the second half of 2002, not long after the next election. A further tranche is then likely to be released in 2003. The Treasurer, Peter Costello, is arguing that the proceeds would eliminate the Government's debt by the financial year 2003-04.

The Budget estimates indicate it would expect to reap about \$33 billion from the sales, although falling share prices and negative publicity could put pressure on such values. Some figures though suggest that a figure closer to \$44 billion is possible based on the value gained in the last float although such an optimistic outcome for the Government would require a huge renaissance in both investor and public faith in Australia's largest company.

If the Government was to obtain the official figure, about \$30 billion would be profit because the government's book value of its Telstra shareholding is a mere \$3.6 billion.

Costello however has to not only concern himself with the huge hole that senior Telstra executives are digging for the Corporation but also the opposition from the Senate where the Government is outvoted by Labor and the smaller parties. The Democrats and the Labor Party have made know their opposition to any further sales.

Very cunningly though the Government has opted for the

high risk strategy of promising a great deal of infrastructure to regional

Australia to be made available from the Telstra sale, thereby hoping to retain their political support in the election. The 2000 Budget is characterised by very low regional spending with loyal National Party backbenchers now promising their voters big bickies after the Telstra sale. It's a high risk strategy because rural voters in Victoria destroyed the Kennett Government over this issue and revealed to all political observers that they aren't either forgiving or all that patient.

The upshot of the Budget on Telstra was that share values con-



tinued to slide. Costello made some extremely ill-chosen but vague remarks in Parliament about declining future receipts from the Corporation and the nervous investors were quickly on the line to their stockbrokers.

In the first trading day after the Budget instalment receipts fell to a low of \$3.53, which now sit 22% below the \$4.50 issue price. Full shares fell to \$6.49 in early trading before recovering to close nine cents, or 1.3%, below the previous close of \$6.61. All this following a pre-Budget day in which Telstra's share value lost 17 cents.

Speed of answer set to drop further

BY IAN McCARTHY

Telstra executives are eyeing off the jobs of thousands of call centre workers at a time when internal figures are showing that more staff need to be employed in the Corporation's 250 call centres, not less.

Internal studies of speed of answer figures has revealed that in some business units Telstra is barely able to answer one call in 100 within the time target. Whilst anecdotal evidence from irate customers and CEPU members strongly suggests that answer times of five minutes and longer are common, figures show that Telstra know that such times are the norm not the exception. In the Gateway business area official figures show that only 1% of calls are answered within the accept-

able time of 15 seconds. Even in business-oriented areas such as ISDN connections and Big Pond waiting on hold for 20 minutes is not unusual (and during April you had to like Frank Sinatra!)

Incredibly Gateway is one of the units targeted for redundancies with one estimate being that Telstra will get rid of 300 jobs in Gateway and Interact, about 100 of which would be in Parramatta.

Directory Assistance calls, where many CEPU call centre members are concentrated, is currently running at 72% for speed of answer within 10 seconds, a figure well below acceptable levels. The CEPU can not see that such a statistic gives Telstra any reason to slash staff. More, not less, need to be employed.