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THE LIBS AND NATS – YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING!

At present the Liberal/National Party Coalition politicians are squealing that they should be the Government, and the ALP Government has no legitimacy.

In Australia's parliamentary system the Government is formed by the party which has the majority of seats (76 or more) in the lower house. Labor has that with the support of the majority of independents, the Liberal/National Parties coalition does not. It's as simple as that.

Yes, Labor received a kick in the teeth by the electorate (and it deserved it), and it lost a lot of seats. However, the big swing against Labor was mostly to the Greens and other independents rather than the Liberal/National Coalition.

It must be remembered that the Liberals and the nationals are two separate parties who could never win enough seats to govern in their own right and therefore are forced into coalition to form a government. This time their coalition fell short of the seats required.

If it's alright for the Libs to form a coalition in order to govern, why not Labor?

Leaving all that aside, now let us see what Labor can do about the real issues – pollution of the environment and its impact, ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the broadband future, workers' rights on the job, health, education and training, Aboriginal rights and living standards, support for the disadvantaged and needy, employment, and so on.

One good thing about the election result is that we now know that any plans by the Liberal/National Parties to make further attacks on working people's rights have at least been put on hold.

EMPLOYEES VOTE UP TELSTRA EA

The overwhelming majority of eligible employees have voted in favour of the Telstra Enterprise Agreement 2010-2012.

Employee participation was high at 71% and 86% of those voted YES to the EA proposal.

The arrangements will deliver an initial pay rise of 2% backdated to 1 July and further 2% increases in October this year and in July and October next year.

The agreement also satisfies a key CEPU demand for a mechanism that enables both employees and the employer to seek to have agreement-related disputes resolved by Fair Work Australia through mediation or by arbitration.

In the coming period, the CEPU will be continuing to push for the creation of pay parity between those on existing Employee Collective Agreements (ECAs) and those on the new EA. As reported previously to members, Telstra has given commitments to engage in talks on the issue.

Further clarification has also been sought by the CEPU on the processes that will now apply to new starters into the CFW and TW workstreams, on details of sick leave, the payment of the \$1,000 customer performance improvement bonus and the application of some allowances.

DIVISIONAL SECRETARY, ED HUSIC, TO ENTER FEDERAL PARLIAMENT

The Communications Division has received the resignation of Divisional Secretary, Ed Husic, following his successful bid to enter the federal parliament on behalf of the ALP.

Ed won the NSW federal seat of Chifley in Sydney's west. Ed was raised in Western Sydney and still lives in Blacktown with his wife Bridget.

The CEPU has thanked Ed for his contribution to the union and wishes him well in his new career.

TELSTRA FREEZES "MERIT" PAY IN CONSUMER, COUNTRYWIDE

Telstra has announced that there will be no "merit-based" pay increases this year for many employees in the Consumer or Countrywide businesses.

Those who will be hit by the decision are those on AWAs, ITEAs and on Part B of the Employee Collective Agreements (ECAs), i.e. those whose pay increases are not guaranteed but are at the discretion of management.

Employees on the Telstra EA or on Part A of the ECAs are not affected by the “freeze”.

For many of the employees it will be the second year in a row that they have gone without a pay increase despite ongoing rises in the cost of living.

The reason being given by management is that times are tough for Telstra and that the company is not meeting its targets in this area. But whose fault is that?

How realistic were the targets in the first place? And how can it be, that in a supposedly merit-based pay system, no AWA or ITEA or Part B employees performed well enough to “merit” a pay rise in these areas?

In fact what Telstra’s move does expose is that “merit-based” pay is a sham. It obviously doesn’t matter how hard and effectively and loyally you work. If you are not employed under an agreement that guarantees pay increases there is every chance you won’t get one. It’s all up to the boss.

Judging from the feedback Telstra is getting from Consumer and TCW employees, Telstra will pay a price for this decision. The CEPU will be pursuing these issues with Telstra on behalf of affected members.

TELSTRA LAUNCHES NEW “SUPERTECH” SERVICE

Telstra has launched a new service designed to position it in the market for home networking services.

Telstra Plus Premium Support will offer either remote or on-site technical assistance to customers wrestling with the multitude of devices and networking requirements that are part and parcel of the broadband world.

For a price between \$99 and \$299, Telstra staff will assist in installing

and upgrading software and hardware devices, deal with virus-infected devices and connect new devices to the home network.

The move is part of an attempt to reposition the company as it faces the possibility of structural separation under Labor’s NBN project.

Under Labor’s model, Telstra will compete against other companies primarily as a retailer, not as a network owner. This prospect is leading to a greater focus within the company on customer service.

But whether or not agreement between Telstra and NBNCo goes ahead as planned, the growth of fibre-based multi-media services means that new business (and employment) opportunities are being opened up within customer premises.

The CEPU supports initiatives that will equip its members to enter these employment areas. The union raised the issue of identifying such areas at a meeting with Telstra in June where the likely impacts of the Telstra/NBN agreement were discussed.

Under that agreement, up to \$100 million will be made available to Telstra to provide employees with fibre-related skills. In the union’s view, such funding should be spent on skills which provide long term job opportunities, not just on those which will be needed during the NBN roll-out.

This means allocating a substantial portion of this funding to equipping the company’s staff to operate in the new environment, from the installation of structured cabling through to the provision of a full range of IP-enabled home services.

PROJECT LIGHTHOUSE IMPLEMENTATION

Telstra has notified the CEPU of its decision to fully implement Project Lighthouse, a reorganisation of Construction and Maintenance (C&M) planning and scheduling functions. The decision will lead to the rede-

ployment of most staff affected but also to a number of redundancies.

Project Lighthouse, which was initiated in March this year, will involve the transfer of functions from C&M Field Enablement and Infrastructure (FEI) Group to within the Field Regions. As a result notices of site closure have been issued to the Project Delivery and Delivery Support and Planning Departments within FEI.

Telstra has told the union that 104 staff will be affected by the two site function closures, 65 of whom are permanent employees and the rest agency staff. At the same time 81 permanent positions will be created nationally.

CEPU is meeting with Telstra to discuss the options, such as relocation and/or swaps, open to any of its members whose jobs have been made redundant and who have not been offered redeployment. Members affected should also contact their state branch for assistance.

TELSTRA OHS ALERT: DEFECTIVE LIGHTING CONNECTORS

CEPU members have contacted the union regarding defective 240 volt connectors associated with fluorescent lights in Telstra exchanges.

It appears that the connector plastic that insulates the active and neutral poles becomes brittle and that they separate upon connection or disconnection of the plug unit. This then in turn exposes the live conductors which can cause electric shock.

The CEPU has been in contact with management regarding this hazard and Health and Safety representatives have been notified. Member should be on the alert for this problem when working in exchanges.

NBN 3.0: INDUSTRY DEBATE ON BROADBAND WIDENS

A new telecommunications industry group has called for a re-think of Australia’s broadband policies.

One effect of the federal election campaign and its close result was to

re-open debate about Labor's NBN project.

But the debate is not simply between those who support Labor's plans for a largely government-funded Fibre to the Home (FTTH) network and those who favour the Coalition's more market-driven approach.

Earlier this month a new industry group calling itself the Alliance for Affordable Broadband proposed a third model, involving a national wholesale 4G wireless network, a targeted approach to fibre roll-out and the encouragement of infrastructure-based competition (as opposed to the wireline monopoly envisaged for NBN Co).

The group includes the CEOs of AAPT, EFTel and BigAir and the founder of Pipe Networks, Bevan Slattery. Slattery has been an outspoken critic of the current NBN model which he has argued does not make economic sense.

With a minority Labor Government now in office, a national FTTH roll-out is back on the agenda. But until the economic case for such a network is clearer it is likely that both the industry and wider political debate about its viability will continue.

ASBESTOS-RELATED DEATHS DOUBLE IN 10 YEARS

The number of deaths from asbestosis in Australia has doubled in a decade according to a report from Safe Work Australia.

The report, Asbestos-related Disease Indicators, published in August, found that in the ten years ending in 2008 the number of deaths from asbestosis had risen by more than 100% while those from mesothelioma had grown by 50%. Mesothelioma is a cancer caused by asbestos exposure.

Because those suffering from asbestosis often suffer from a number of other related and potentially fatal conditions, asbestosis is often not identified as the actual cause of death. For this reason it is likely that

the number of deaths related to asbestos exposure is being understated.

Mesothelioma deaths rose from 416 in 1997 to 628 in 2008. The good news is that the number of new mesothelioma cases diagnosed is falling as more controls against occupational exposure are put in place.

In particular the study found that new cases of asbestos-related disease were more likely to be result of exposure in the demolition of buildings that in the course of mining asbestos or the manufacturing of asbestos-related products.

So while the days when employees like those at James Hardy worked covered with asbestos dust may be over, there is no room for complacency. As the incident at Windsor Exchange shows, asbestos may still be released into the work environment during the course of building works if the proper precautions are not taken.

Any member who believes she/he has been exposed to asbestos at work should contact the union for advice. Any Telstra members in this situation should also make sure they are put on the company's asbestos register.

HARD ROAD AHEAD FOR U.S. WORKERS

Financial markets are in two minds about whether the US is headed for a "double-dip" recession. But for millions of US workers the state of affairs in the country is perfectly clear.

Official unemployment in the US is just under 10%, with the real numbers probably much higher. Some 10 million people are receiving unemployment insurance, almost four times more than in 2007, and a further 4.4 million are on some form of welfare.

Among those that do have jobs, many are the "working poor". According to figures released in a USA Today survey in August, a staggering 40 million people get food stamps to supplement their incomes – a 50%

increase since the Global Financial Crisis began.

Meanwhile, the wages of working Americans continue to deteriorate. Average private sector wages declined by 6% over 2009. And earlier this month the *New York Times* reported that wages for non managerial workers in that city had fallen by 10.4% since the financial crisis.

Wage levels for these workers is now barely above the poverty line. Yet over the same three years, the pay of managers in New York has risen 11%.

This trend towards greater inequality in the US is not new. In fact since the 1970s the share of US wealth going to working people has declined dramatically. But since 2001 it has fallen particularly sharply - from around 58% to 53% in 2010.

For a time, the effects of the decline were masked by borrowing. But with the financial crisis and the cut-back on credit, the real state of working people's financial situation is being revealed. The result is distress for millions of people and a slowing of the entire economy as purchasing power shrinks.

It remains to be seen how long US workers will tolerate this situation but it is clear that without a concerted fightback the road ahead will be hard indeed.

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