



WORKERS SOLIDARITY

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Telstra Calling. You're Fired!

Early March (08/03/2K) saw the Board & Senior Management at Australia's primary telecommunication provider Telstra announce a \$2.1 billion profit for the first six months of the 1999/2000 financial year. Rather than using these massive profits to ensure rural services and lower the cost of calls, the Board & Senior Management have instead chosen to restructure the company, increase spending overseas in countries that already have decent telecommunication networks, (USA, UK, Singapore, etc...), beef up Senior Executive perks & bonuses and shed 16,000 jobs.

These job cuts tie in with the Federal Government's continuing push to fully privatise the company to make it more lucrative to other transnational corporations in a time of global mergers & acquisitions of anything e- or dot.com. Over the past decade numerous sections of Telstra have been shut down and replaced with casual, contract and outsourced labour. At the same time, retrenchments and new technology have seen Management demands on workers increase, particularly amongst the predominantly female staffed call centres.

Telstra is made up of several branches and current restructuring will see it sell off further chunks of itself. First to go will be the construction section, Network Design & Construction (NDC), which amongst other tasks is responsible for laying new cables throughout the country. This has resulted in the planned sell off of 6,000 personnel to private enterprise. Another two branches will also go with the loss of a further 10,000 workers.

It remains to be seen exactly which branches will be cut and according to an IWW member this uncertainty has done wonders for worker morale. All in all, one in every three Telstra employees will be out of a job by the end of 2000/2001 financial year. Whilst many of the workers will receive retrenchment packages, Telstra's move towards using casual, contract and outsourced labour, increasing workloads and privatising services is part of a Federal Government backed offensive seeking to lower wages and destroy employment security and union membership.

The leadership of the unions which cover many Telstra workers, the Commonwealth Public Services Union (CPSU) and the Communications Electrical Plumbing Union (CEPU), unfortunately not known for their militancy, are under pressure from an unhappy grassroots membership to take action over the decisions of Telstra's Senior Management. They have organised some recent lunchtime meetings and issued a statement declaring that "Telstra staff declare that from 12 noon on Thursday 30th of March 2000 they are taking control of the company and have ordered the immediate dismissal of all Senior Executive Managers. Staff will now perform all day-to-day management functions until new appointments are made". Whether this will result in direct action and worker control remains to be seen, but our contacts think that indirect inaction is more likely.

In the meantime the CPSU/CEPU have also produced a sticker directing people to call 1800-800 437 and let Telstra management know that they oppose job

cuts and the inevitable downgrading of services that will follow. This number is normally pasted on Telstra vehicles and used for complaints about workers' driving. Our contacts assure us that messages pass from manager to manager very quickly and usually result in the petty harassment of rank and file drivers so let's put the number to a more positive use.

Fairwear Keep Fighting!

The Victorian-based Fairwear campaign against clothing sweatshops has entered its third year. The group pulled off a number of exciting actions in 1999, crashing the Melbourne Cup and various "shops of shame" around Melbourne. One action involved supporters entering one firm's showroom stripping down and parading for the media claiming they'd "Rather go naked than wear clothes of shame". Melbourne Fashion Week's Southbank celebrations were recently disrupted by supporters wearing nothing but a banner denouncing the industry's exploitation of home-based outworkers. One protester stated: "This week they're talking about everything to do with the multi-million dollar fashion industry except for the people who actually make the clothes. We're going to make sure the workers' side gets heard."

The campaign is growing in strength with increasing numbers of fashion companies being pressured into signing up to the Outworkers Code of Practice. The code ensures that workers are provided with decent conditions and paid the award rate. Non award rates often go lower than \$1.70 an hour in an industry worth over \$8 billion. Being home-based, most outworkers are not provided with compensation for injuries, sick pay and have few of the rights most workers have come to expect.

With over 300,000 home based outworkers in Australia, it is imperative that Fairwear continues to have success. The following companies are just a few of the many who continue to hold out on signing the code. So avoid their products and call, write or pay them a visit to tell them to stop ripping off outworkers.

Companies & Shops of Shame in Victoria:

Mossimo and Mooks, 30 Flockhart St.
Abbotsford, 3067. 03 9428 9428
Stussy and Sista, 98-109 Wellington St.
Collingwood. 03 9417 1766
Rich Clothing (!) Warehouse, 3-7 Ferguson St. Abbotsford. 03 9419 2299
Ojay Pty Ltd, 671 Chapel St.
South Yarra, 3141. 03 9827 4244
Very Very, 531 Chapel St.
South Yarra, 3141. 03 9824 0425
Atelier 15, 1st Floor. 2 Oliver Lane.
Melbourne, 3000. 03 9827 4750
Mark Richard Designs, 240 Hoddle St.
Abbotsford. 03 9419 5522
Perri Cutten, 253 Flinders Lane
Melbourne, 3000. 03 9650 4093

Other Australian Companies who have not signed the Homeworkers Code of Practice:

26 Red / AP Sportswear / Bad Girl / Billabong / Billie Cart Clothing / Blue Gum / Chelsea Girl / Cherry Lane / Converse / Elle Clothing / Fashion Warehouse / Fiorelli / Fletcher Jones / Hang Ten / Jump Items / Kamikaze / Knickerbox briefs / Laura Ashley / Mambo / Marianna Hardwick / Oshkosh B'Gosh / Pilgrim / RM Williams / Yakka

Australian Companies who HAVE signed the Homeworkers Code of Practice:

Adidas / Anthea Crawford / Best and Less / Brian Rochford / Country Road / Cue / David Jones / Dotti / Events / Fashion Fair / Holeproof / Hot Tuna / Hound Dog / Jag / Just Jeans / Katies / K Mart / Lowes Manhattan / Myer Grace Brothers / Rockmans / Roger David / Sportsgirl / Sussan / Suzanne Grae / Target / Westco

For more information on the Industrial Workers of the World, visit www.iww.org.au

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