People power stops the sale

The jobs and working conditions of ETU members employed in the power industry are safe, with a new look State Government committed to keep generators in public hands.

The ALP politicians who attempted to push through the sale of generators – against the wishes of the community and the labour movement – have paid a high price.

Michael Costa, the architect and strongest supporter of privatisation, was sacked as Treasurer on 4 September.

Soon afterwards, Morris Iemma, the man who sacked Costa, resigned as premier, following the exit of former deputy premier John Watkins days earlier.

Costa and Iemma had staked their careers on electricity privatisation – but their plans drew support only from self-interested big business, the media and a few individuals who stood to benefit from any sell-off.

The vast majority of the people of NSW opposed any sale – with up the 75% of voters telling opinion pollsters the power industry should not be sold.

Costa and Iemma had no mandate for the proposed sale – in fact they had specifically promised prior to the 2007 state election that generators would not be sold off.

Opposition to the sale of generators was even stronger among members of trade unions and the Australian Labor Party.

On 3 May, the ALP Annual Conference voted by a huge margin of 702-107 against electricity privatisation.

The vote reflected the views of rank-and-file ALP members from communities across NSW, as well as the views of trade unions.

Eleven years earlier, a similar privatisation proposal had been rejected by the 1997 ALP Conference.

The proponents of that proposal – Bob Carr and Michael Egan – accepted the democratic verdict of the Conference and moved on to run a successful Labor government.

Michael Costa and Morris Iemma chose a different path – immediately stating that they would proceed with the plan to sell off generators regardless of the wishes of ALP members or the people of NSW.

In doing so they provoked a crisis that ended their political careers.

With 16 Labor MPs vowing to vote against privatisation, the former premier and his supporters were forced to seek support from the Opposition and minor parties, including the Shooters Party.

But even this desperate strategy failed on 28 August when the Nationals and then the Liberals refused to support Morris Iemma’s plans at a special sitting of State Parliament.

A day later, Morris Iemma announced that the Government would give up on trying to sell or lease the generators.

ETU Secretary Bernie Riordan announced that the end result was ‘a win for ETU members, for democracy and for the people of NSW’.

‘The proposal to sell or lease the generators was bad policy and bad economics,’ said Bernie. ‘It would have left an essential service at the mercy of the private sector.

‘The industry would have been less safe, less reliable and people would inevitable pay more for their electricity.’

Bernie said that the efforts of ETU members had been vital in stopping the sale of generators.

‘The outcome proves that when union members are active we can take on any challenge,’ said Bernie.

‘When we took on the Coalition to stop the power sale, we were able to solve the problem and it’s very clear now that the NSW Labor Government will not sell the generators.

‘Contrast that to the NSW Liberal Party, which still supports electricity privatisation and supported Howard’s IR laws all the way.’

But the State Opposition is set to revive plans to sell off the industry if the Liberal/National Coalition wins the 2011 NSW election.

Current Opposition leader Barry O’Farrell is likely to be replaced before 2011 by either Chris Hartcher or Mike Baird.

Both men are senior right-wing Liberal MPs who strongly support electricity privatisation.

Senior Liberal Mike Gallacher told State Parliament on 28 August that the Coalition would take a new energy policy to the 2011 election and ‘our policy will include the principle of private sector involvement’.

Baird indicated to ETU members, during the recent campaign to stop the power sale, that he also supported privatisation.

Bernie said that Nathan Rees, the new Premier, ‘knows more about the challenges facing working families than anyone in the Opposition’.

‘He’s got some big responsibilities and he deserves a fair go,’ said Bernie.
‘Our members were magnificent’

It is now ancient history, but the ALP Conference in May proved yet again why it is so important for the ETU to be affiliated to the Labor Party.

Along with other unions, the ETU was instrumental in convincing the conference delegates of the lies, misconceptions and perils associated with the Iemma/Costa plan. Our campaign utilised our areas of expertise. Yellow posters and stickers could be seen all over NSW. We even got some great publicity from the front page of regional newspapers, such as Dubbo, when our members complied with the State Council decision to not remove the posters from poles.

To all of those members who assisted in the campaign, a big THANK YOU! You were magnificent!

Anyone who does not understand the machinations of politics was probably aghast at the recent resignation of Morris Iemma.

However, Morris sealed his fate on the Sunday of the ALP Conference when he announced he was going to defy the Conference decision. BAD CALL! No individual is bigger than the Party – never has been, never will!

An interesting anecdote is that in December 2007, I was at a meeting in the Premier’s office with Karl Bitar, Mike Kaiser and Morris. I told Morris that in my view, the Party would not cop his privatisation plan and that it would be defeated at Conference. He told me that if he was defeated at Conference he would take that as a vote of ‘no confidence’ and resign. What a pity that he did not keep his word and tried to do a dirty deal with the Liberal Party. His reputation has been diminished as a result.

As of 1 July 2009, the ETU is changing the way that members can pay for their annual ticket by changing the way that members can claim their fees on their tax return so quickly. Every other State Branch has undertaken this step so NSW is now out of kilter which provides enormous administrative problems for the National Office of the CEPU. I have been advised by my colleagues in the other States that their members have preferred the financial year billing because they can claim their fees on their tax return so quickly.

I have been ambivalent on this issue over the last few years, however based on comments from members in other States of Australia and the obvious benefits of uniformity for the administration, the State Council approved this change in billing to commence 1 July 2009.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all ETU members and their families a Merry Christmas and a happy and safe start to 2009 where we will continue to work hard for our membership.

Bernie Riordan

Rob gone fishing after 17 years

Rob Alexander has retired after 17 years as an ETU official. He worked as an organiser in Newcastle before helping to establish the Newcastle Electroskills and Electrogroup.

Rob’s career in the industry began in 1964 when he commenced an apprenticeship with State Transit, later becoming an active ETU delegate. In 1991, Rob started work as an ETU organiser and over the years made a significant contribution to the welfare of union members and the local community.

Rob says the highlights of his work include getting the best possible deal, after a ‘good struggle’, for electricians affected by the closure of BHP’s Newcastle steelworks in 1999. He also set up the ETU holiday cabins in Nambucca Heads and, over the past two years, helped establish the Newcastle Electroskills and Electrogroup facilities.

Rob is aged just 58, but is able to retire with security thanks to his decision to begin contributing to superannuation way back in 1965. He advises young ETU members today to follow the same choice. With a caravan at Fingle Bay, Rob and his wife of 40 years are looking forward to sharing their love of fishing and golf.

Paul boosts ETU policy and research

Paul Lister has joined the ETU head office team as Policy and Research Officer. Paul has a strong commitment to unionism, starting with his early work as a delegate in the airline industry. Wanting to make a difference, Paul became interested in politics and worked for two NSW Labor Government Ministers, gaining a good understanding of the workings of government.

His contacts and knowledge are now being used on behalf of ETU members as the union makes policy submissions on industry issues such as licensing and infrastructure.

Paul will build the ETU’s public profile through proactive media management and is redesigning the ETU website to be more member-friendly.

Bernie Riordan
A proposed national licensing system for electricians could threaten industry safety, lower standards and increase costs.

The proposal to move to a national licensing model came from a meeting of COAG in July. (COAG, or the Council of Australian Governments, is composed of representatives of federal, state and territory governments.)

The ETU has identified deep flaws in the proposal, which was developed without industry consultation, despite requirements in COAG’s own guidelines for consultation with stakeholders.

ETU Assistant Secretary Paul Sinclair said there are strong reasons to stick with a state-based licensing system, but some functions could be administered nationally.

‘Each state has different conditions and a different legal and regulatory framework. That’s why state-based licensing works best, because it is tailored to the local reality,’ said Paul.

‘The people from COAG would understand this better if they actually undertook consultation with the industry rather than trying to dish up a half-baked solution to a problem that doesn’t exist to begin with.’

Paul said one of the biggest dangers of an ill-considered move to national licensing would be a race to the ‘lowest common denominator’.

‘One of the dangers is that instead of bringing together the best features of the state systems, COAG is likely to take the easy way out and go straight for the lowest standards that exist around the country, and this is exactly what industry and big business will want.

‘There should be no compromise on safety. If a national model is going to be discussed, it must adopt the highest existing standards as a starting point.’

COAG has cited ‘economic efficiency’ as a factor in licensing, but this is a major concern for the ETU.

‘Licensing laws were introduced because economic efficiency was costing lives. The priority of any licensing system must be to ensure safety for the tradesperson, the consumer and the public,’ said Paul.

The proposed national scheme fails to take into account the differing work cover, consumer protection and business laws in each state and territory. It is also likely to increase costs for government and the industry.

‘The ETU wants to maintain the current high standards for trade qualifications in NSW. We do not want to see these standards watered down by people who do not understand our industry,’ said Paul Sinclair.

If a shift to national licensing becomes inevitable, the ETU would support a minimalist model that would transfer administration and issuing of licenses to a national body, while leaving regulation and policing to be handled at state level.

One of the biggest problems with the proposed national licensing scheme is that the board running it would not adequately involve industry representatives, including the ETU and other unions.

‘The ETU represents around half the total number of licensed electricians in NSW. It is ridiculous to make major changes to licensing without consulting the representatives or including us on the board,’ said Paul.

‘The bottom line is that the current licensing system in NSW works. Why add another layer of red tape and all the associated costs and time wasting?’

State-based licensing works

Jarrad scores on and off the field

Second-year apprentice Jarrad Kennedy can juggle learning his trade with a promising rugby league career, thanks to reforms brought in by the NRL this year.

Rugby league’s governing body ruled that players in the under-20 Toyota Cup could not be required to train between 8 am and 4 pm, ensuring that young athletes can build a career outside football.

Jarrad, now aged 19, left his family in Tuross Heads in 2006 to take up a contract with the Canberra Raiders. He commenced an electrician apprenticeship through ElectrogroGroup soon afterwards.

‘I wanted to do a trade and I wasn’t too bad at maths so I gave it a go,’ said Jarrad. ‘So far, so good. A football career is very short, so you have to plan for life afterwards.’

Jarrad, a strapping second-rower at six foot two and 100 kilos, had a very rewarding 2008 season with his young team winning the grand final in October.

‘I dropped a few early balls, but I was lucky enough to score the winning try in extra time,’ he said.

Jarrad hopes to train or play with the Raiders first grade side during 2009 and says the club is poised for a big year with young talent coming through. He’s looking forward to the arrival of his younger brother, who has also been contracted to play with Canberra.

Jarrad had to move away from his parents to the national capital to play with the Raiders, but says he is ‘growing up fast’ and has developed some rudimentary cooking and cleaning skills.
WHY WE STOPPED THE SALE

Local campaign targeted MPs

ETU members in action around Newcastle and the Central Coast

ETU members in the Central Coast and Newcastle regions ran a powerful campaign against electricity privatisation.

Since December 2007 – when the State Government announced plans to sell major parts of the power industry – hundreds of workers lobbied MPs, organised and attended rallies, and took industrial action. Les McAllister, a union delegate and technician at Vales Point power station, was one of the ETU’s key local leaders in the campaign.

‘When we heard that a Labor government was planning to sell off power, we were outraged. We knew we had to take action and hit the ground running hard,’ said Les.

Hundreds of ETU members from Vales Point and Munmorah power stations held a mass meeting and invited all local State MPs to attend.

Les McAllister and other active ETU members focused much of their campaign efforts on applying pressure to other local Labor MPs to oppose the sell off.

‘There was no support in the ALP for privatisation, there was no support among local people and there was no support across the State.

‘The Government and these MPs had no mandate for the sale. Labor specifically promised at the last election that the industry would not be privatised,’ said Les.

‘Yet some Labor MPs chose to ignore the people who voted them in and instead supported a policy that would hurt the State and especially hurt our local communities.’

Local ETU members also took industrial action, including a series of half-day stoppages.

‘We had strong support from Newcastle Trades Hall, Unions NSW and lots of other people in the community. Iemma and Costa were totally out of touch, but they seemed to be interested in what big business wants, not local people,’ said Les.

A meeting with the Opposition’s Shadow Energy Minister Mike Baird did not go well. ‘He still supports the sale,’ said Les.

‘Workers in our area were very, very resolute. The government offered us money to roll over and cop the sale, but we wouldn’t have a bar of that,’ said Les.

‘These people have worked in the industry for 20-25 years and they care about service, about safety and about reasonably priced power for the community.

‘There is already competition in NSW from three publicly-owned corporations and that keeps prices down.

‘There is clearly the capacity to upgrade and build new stations within public ownership to meet the future needs of the State.

‘What Iemma and Costa did was against the interests of our community, and they were quite prepared to destroy the ALP in the process.’

Super Saturday down South

The Stop the Sell Off campaign against electricity privatisation held a day of action on Super Saturday 16 August.

ETU members were prominent at dozens of events across Sydney and NSW, as community activists and supporters reminded the Iemma Government that the people want the power industry kept safe in public hands.

ETU Canberra organiser Matt McCann said that ETU members and supporters were active from Canberra and all the way through southern NSW.

‘We had four Stop the Sell Off events on Super Saturday – at Queanbeyan, Albury, Bega and Goulburn,’ said Matt.

‘Union members and local activists handed out leaflets, talked with locals and asked people to sign the petition.’

Many Country Energy employees were active in the campaign, including Barry Solley, who has worked at the Queanbeyan Field Service Centre for 18 years.

At 54 years of age, Barry says he was active in the campaign to protect the younger generations.

‘I’ve got three daughters and four grandkids. I want them to have reliable, safe and affordable power for the future, and decent jobs in the industry if they need that,’ said Barry.

‘We need to continue to make people aware of the benefits of our publicly-owned industry.

Why should we sell off what we already own?’ said Barry.

Super Saturday was just one event in a strong campaign waged in southern NSW.

Local campaign groups organised community meetings and lobbying of MPs from all political parties throughout the year. Matt McCann said one local activist who deserved recognition for some great work on the campaign around Bega was Craig Malcolm.

ETU Secretary Bernie Riordan spoke at Bega in July to a community meeting that attracted many Country Energy workers and other locals concerned about privatisation.

A similar meeting took place in Queanbeyan in late August.

ETU NSW SPRING 2008
One MP’s story: Why I opposed privatisation

**PAUL GIBSON, MP FOR BLACKTOWN, EXPLAINS WHY HE STOOD FIRM AGAINST ELECTRICITY PRIVATISATION.**

The privatisation of electricity debate progressed from deciding what side of the fence you may be on, to the future of the Australian Labor Party. I believe that we were fighting for the future of the oldest and the greatest political party in the history of this nation and the privatisation issue in a way moved into a secondary position.

If you join a political party, you join to abide by the platform of that party. There is no provision in that party to make other decisions that are against party policy. You read in history books about people in years gone by who decided to go against the wish of the people and their party and created their own parties and of course, if you talk about Germany or any other place, you realise in the short term they had a win, but in the long term they had devastating defeats.

If you want to change the party platform and policy there is a way to do that. You talk to branch members, you talk at branch meetings, you talk at regional meetings and you put forward your ideas to conference and then conference is the determining factor as to whether the changes should be introduced or not.

Another indicator of seeing whether your ideas are popular is by talking to the people of New South Wales. They may not belong to the Labor Party but they are taxpayers, and 79% said they are opposed to privatisation of electricity in New South Wales.

Yet, Premier Iemma and the Treasurer, Michael Costa ploughed on and put the future of the Labor Party and this State in great peril in my opinion.

It’s not easy to go against colleagues that you have worked with for years and agreed with on probably 99% of occasions.

On the privatisation debate there were a handful of us who totally opposed it and in my case I have been called everything from a ‘maverick’ to ‘a non-supporter of caucus’. These things concern me as they would anyone, but my main concern is to believe in the platform and the policy of the Party that I joined and the Party that has given me great opportunities over many years. I have often said that I joined the Australian Labor Party, I didn’t join the Morris Iemma or the Michael Costa party.

I also believe that the people of New South Wales, the ordinary punters out there, know as much about politics as politicians think they know. You can’t say – as was stated to the ETU in the week leading up to the state election – that we have no interest in electricity privatisation of any kind, and then straight after the election backflip and call for the privatisation of electricity.

Initially, we were talking about a privatisation price of $20 billion, then dramatically it fell to $15 billion and at conference we learnt from the former premier that it was going to be around the $10 billion mark.

There was very little talk about carbon trade-off. Because the generators are coal fired, we could be talking billions of dollars in carbon trade-offs and who will pay for that has not been made clear.

There was nothing in any report to say that a new generator is part of any privatisation plan. The Owen Enquiry had very narrow terms of reference and could only come to the conclusion that it came to.

Look at what has happened in other places overseas. In London in 1975, 200,000 workers were employed in the electricity industry. They privatised electricity in 1990 and at that stage there were 150,000 workers in the industry. Today that figure has fallen to 85,000. If you take a look at Victoria in 1996 when they privatised, there were initially no job losses – now in 2008, 16,000 people have lost their jobs. They are experiencing more blackouts than ever before in Victoria, do we want to go down the same line?

A lot of ordinary people depend on electricity and a lot of families can’t afford what they pay for electricity bills today, let alone what they will pay if the private sector gets their hands on the generators.

In 1990, when privatisation took place in London there were 14 companies that provided electricity. Today those 14 companies have been reduced to seven. In Europe 22,000 people died due to the cold and many of these people died because they could not afford to pay their electricity bills. Surely none of us want to be part of a sale that would be so harsh to the people who look to the Labor Government to support them – the battler and the person on a very low income.

It comes down to one thing: Essential services must remain in Government ownership; otherwise we don’t really need Governments.

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Paul Gibson, MP

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**IF YOU TAKE A LOOK AT VICTORIA IN 1996 WHEN THEY PRIVATISED, THERE WERE INITIALLY NO JOB LOSSES – NOW IN 2008, 16,000 PEOPLE HAVE LOST THEIR JOBS.**
ABCC and unfair laws must go

The ETU and other construction industry unions have launched a new campaign to get rid of the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) and unfair laws that target workers in the industry.

The Rights on Site campaign – featuring television advertising, a website and other materials – will educate the public about the draconian powers of the ABCC and build support to get rid of the laws.

The ABCC has sweeping powers that apply only to workers in the construction industry.

The ABCC and its heavy powers were introduced by the Howard Government, but the Rudd Government plans to keep the unfair system in place until 2010.

Already a number of construction workers have been interrogated under the laws and one - Noel Washington from the Victorian CFMEU – is being prosecuted.

Construction workers can be called in for interrogation by the ABCC about a union action in the industry can be targeted by the ABCC. Workers are forced to answer questions about what they did, what they said and what others did or said.

These laws were brought in by the Howard Government to undermine workers' ability to maintain good working conditions through their unions.

Since the laws were introduced in 2005, more than 80 people have been hauled in for secret interrogations by the ABCC about everyday workplace matters. If they refuse to attend or answer questions, they can be jailed for six months.

The election of a Rudd Labor Government was welcomed by the union movement as a change for the better for working people.

While Kevin Rudd has promised to deliver fair IR laws, he insists on keeping the ABCC until 2010. This follows a scare campaign from the Liberal Party and big business during the 2007 federal election. The ABCC employs 150 enforcers and spends $33 million of taxpayers’ money to harass and intimidate construction industry workers.

The International Labour Organisation has condemned these laws and has called on the Federal Government to abolish the laws and the ABCC.

Many more ordinary workers are threatened with $22,000 fines and loss of pay if they stop work for any reason. Workers cannot even stop work over safety in an industry where, on average, one worker is killed every week.

To find out more about the campaign and what you can do: www.rightsonsite.org.au

Aussie bike mechanic takes on the world

An apprenticeship and a lot of hard work took the brother of one ETU member from Canberra to the glamorous world of grand prix bike racing.

Patrick Primmer – brother of James Primmer, an ETU delegate at ACTEW/AGL in Canberra – began a motorbike mechanic apprenticeship in 1995 and was later awarded Apprentice of the Year.

The award enabled Patrick, then a proud trade union member, to join Alistair Maxwell's race team in Sydney and, later, Phil Taintor Racing in Melbourne, a company working with World Superbikes and Grand Prix bikes.

Patrick had moved well beyond general motorbike mechanics to become a leading specialist in suspension technology.

Three years ago he began working with Ohlins, a Swedish suspension supply company that is contracted to the top competitive bike teams around the world.

Ohlins supply not only suspension technology to the top racing teams, but a dedicated technician to each elite rider.

Patrick Primmers works solely with Jorge Lorenzo, a champion rider with the celebrated Fiat Yamaha team. Patrick works on Jorge's bike before each race to ensure the suspension is right.

The job takes Patrick around the world to 16 Grand Prix events each year, including Australia's Phillip Island GP race each October. James Primmer and CEPU Assistant Secretary Neville Betts visited Phillip Island last month and were able to see the Fiat/Yamaha bikes up close and meet Jorge Lorenzo.

Patrick now lives in Andorra, a prosperous tax haven between France and Spain that boasts the world's highest life expectancy.
ETU members in the construction industry are gearing up to win improved pay and conditions in their next enterprise agreement.

With the current agreement expiring in October, the ETU’s Arc Up 08 campaign is already up and running, beginning with a survey of union members in the industry.

Based on the responses from ETU members, a log of claims was developed and union delegates approved this at meetings in August.

ETU organiser Dave McKinley said: ‘Members expect a decent outcome, reflecting the fact that they live in the most expensive city in Australia and are struggling with mortgages, fuel and food prices. ‘We’ve run a strong campaign to recruit more delegates and that has been very successful.

The ETU log of claims includes:

• A 6% per annum pay rise
• Increased travel allowance to 0.8 of an hour per day
• A 3% increase in superannuation over three years
• Increased allowances, with the licensing allowance to rise from $43 to $100 per week
• Better RDO provisions
• Improvements in EBA provisions for inclement weather, and
• Increased clothing and living away allowances.

Dave McKinley said that the Arc Up 08 campaign would be controlled by the delegates elected by ETU members.

‘Our members deserve improved pay and conditions, but members will have to get active in this campaign if we are going to achieve our aims,’ said Dave.

An ETU delegation met with the employer representatives NECA but so far progress has been slow.

‘The bosses are dragging the chain at this stage,’ said Dave. ‘From October, we can take industrial action and that will be seriously considered if negotiations are not fruitful.’

DELEGATES SAY

Everyone get active

This is our chance for the next three years so it’s important to get everyone active and on board. Superannuation is vitally important – it’s our little kitty for the future, something to keep our standard of living up to scratch when we retire. We deserve the pay rise given the risks we have to deal with. The two biggest killers are electric shock and falls and we have to work with these fears every day.

Joe Deguara, Downer EDI

Sparkies deserve more

As construction workers we should be at least on a level playing field with the other trades. As sparkies we do deserve more. To bring it into perspective, you don’t see other tradies dying at the rate we do. We’re being undersold for the risks and for our skills and abilities. I was laid up for a week from one accident – I picked up an unsecured active terminal — it could’ve killed me. This campaign is make or break.

Brett Walker, Heyday Group

There are a number of new delegates up and running,’ said Dave. The ETU log of claims includes:

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ETU rail members win 8% pay rise

ETU's new RailCorp agreement achieved an 8% pay rise for members without tradeoffs.

As part of the Combined Rail Unions (CRU) campaign for a new collective agreement, ETU members at RailCorp reached agreement with the NSW Government after 10 months of negotiations.

The agreement was secured by a negotiating team comprising delegates and organisers from the ETU, RTBU, ASU, AMWU and AWU and was presented to workers as part of a CRU road show in September.

The 8% pay rise over two years, backdated from 1 April 2008 – the expiry date of the old agreement – represents a significant win for ETU members.

The backdating of the agreement had never been on the table and was secured in negotiations.

The agreement is not dependent upon any cost saving measures and has been achieved without the loss of any existing conditions.

RailCorp had been pushing the NSW Government's position that any wage increase above 2.5% was to be funded by cost savings.

Other significant elements of the core agreement included a ‘no extra claims’ clause in areas where RailCorp intends to undertake reforms over the next two years, and a provision that allows for any savings generated by workers in that period to go towards the next agreement in 2010.

The CRU Campaign Committee also negotiated a deed to be included in the agreement that will maintain all existing conditions that were to be removed under Work Choices. ETU delegate Peter Woods said result was a good one for ETU members in the rail industry.

‘A decent pay rise, backdated, with no trade-offs or loss of conditions, that’s not a bad result,’ he said. ‘When you consider the current IR environment, and the Government’s fixation on 2.5%, we did very well – especially compared to other industries.

‘One of the biggest things to come out of negotiations was the transfer of savings from this agreement period to the next. This will put us on the front foot at the start of the next round of negotiations for the 2010 agreement.’

RailCorp had originally gone into negotiations with a raft of proposed cutbacks including the axing of 417 station positions, the elimination of promotion and disciplinary appeals, the halving of uncertified sick days and the removal of public holiday and annual leave accruals.

ETU delegate Alan Small said the threats served only to unite the CRU Campaign Committee. ‘We were united on all core principles and we weren’t going to give up our entitlements,’ he said.

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The ETU has welcomed a proposal for 20 weeks combined paternity leave for working parents.

The proposed scheme, developed by the Productivity Commission after submissions from many groups including unions, would deliver 18 weeks paid leave for working mothers and two weeks leave for fathers. Prime Minister Rudd expressed general support for the scheme, which would be government-funded to the tune of approximately $450 million per annum.

The proposed scheme falls short of the 26 weeks leave that Unions NSW has been campaigning for, but is still a big step forward, said ETU Secretary Bernie Riordan. ‘The reality for most families today is that both parents must work to pay the bills,’ said Bernie. ‘Paid parental leave will ensure that the health of both child and mother is protected without endangering the financial needs of families. The fact that fathers would also receive paid leave is excellent. ‘We believe working parents need 26 weeks leave, as proposed by Unions NSW, but we do recognise that 20 weeks leave will make a great difference for our members and their families.’

The Productivity Commission’s proposed scheme would pay the minimum wage of $544 per week for 18 weeks to mothers who have been in the workforce for at least 12 months. Father would be able to share this leave if they are deemed the primary carer. Otherwise, fathers would be entitled to two weeks paid leave.

Around 140,000 mothers per year would benefit from the proposed scheme. Mothers not in the paid workforce would not get maternity leave, but would be eligible for a $5,000 maternity allowance as well as family tax benefit B, while fathers would still get two weeks paid leave.

Unions NSW will continue the campaign for six months paid maternity leave, funded by government and business, for all working mothers.

Jeana Trasler says being a first-time mother is demanding, but a decent paid maternity leave scheme can make a big difference. Unlike most working women in Australia, Jeana was lucky enough to be eligible for paid leave when she gave birth to her daughter Olivia in 2006. Jeana’s employer, Electro Skills (a training organisation for electrical apprentices), offered her the choice of three months leave on full pay, or six months on half pay. ‘After three months, I was able to return to work for one day a week,’ said Jeana. ‘Later I went to two days and now I’m working three days per week.’ She said it was hard to leave her newborn child in someone else’s care but, like many other mothers, she had to return to work for financial reasons. ‘Jeana’s experience contrasts with those of her friends who did not have the benefits of paid maternity leave. ‘It was emotionally and financially harder for some of my friends. I think every working mother should have access to paid leave.’

GOT A QUESTION ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK? THE ETU’S MAN IN THE KNOW, AARON MCKINNON IS HERE TO HELP!

Enterprise bargaining – getting started

It’s about that time when a lot of enterprise agreements (EBAs) are expiring, so it’s bargaining time again. So what do you need to know to start the bargaining process? Firstly, whether your agreement is expiring soon or you are looking to negotiate your first workplace agreement, if you are covered under the federal WorkChoices laws, you need to get organized.

Contact your ETU organiser to get a bargaining period started on your behalf. The bargaining period notifies your employer of the list of conditions – including increases to wages and allowances – that you think need to be negotiated in your new workplace agreement.

You must have a bargaining period in place so your negotiation meetings are recognised. It takes seven days from the date the application is lodged for a bargaining period to start. This process also lets you hold a vote later on whether or not to take industrial action to support your claims. Without an official bargaining period, you cannot take protected industrial action to support your claim.

Recently, the Labor Government made changes to WorkChoices to let you agree to vary and extend your current registered EBA. This lets you keep the old conditions but also lets you make changes to the agreement that you and your employer agree to. The catch is, you can’t do this if you have taken industrial action in trying to get those changes.

So, get the members together and give your ETU organiser a call. If you don’t know who your organiser is, you can email me at Askaaron@etunsw.asn.au.
JIM’S HAT IN THE RING

ETU Branch President and ALP member Jim Macfadyen stood for re-election to Gosford Council. He was previously elected to the council in 2004 and was mayor for the last 12 months.

‘Myself and another Labor Councillor were elected on 15 September. We held the same percentage vote as last time, so we defied the statewide swing against the ALP.

‘I think I was fairly effective as mayor and we delivered what the people wanted. But another factor was the strong public stand I took as an ETU member against the State Government on electricity privatisation.

‘We’re committed to working with the New council to deliver to the people of Gosford.

‘We’ll be focusing on negotiating with the NSW Government for more money for roads, clean water and basic infrastructure.’

MARK STRIVES FOR BALANCE

Acting ETU organiser and ALP member Mark Buttridge stood for election to Sutherland Shire Council. He was the ALP candidate for the federal seat of Cook at the 2004 and 2007 elections.

‘I was pleased to be elected on 13 September – and the Labor vote increased in our area, against the trend elsewhere.

‘I was known as a strong local supporter of the Your Rights at Work campaign and also as an opponent of electricity privatisation.

‘It also helped that the local Libs ran into problems and their people ran as independents.

‘Over-development is a huge issue down here. People don’t want another Rockdale/Hurstville-type council. We need to balance the competing claims of the need to house people and the need to retain the character of the area.’

COMMITTED AND HONOURED

Graham McLaughlin, an electrician working in Berrima, is honoured to be elected to Wingecarribee Shire Council, in the Southern Highlands.

‘I’m very committed to this area. I’ve lived and worked here for 30 years and I’ve raised my family here.

‘There is no greater honour than to represent your community,’ he said.

‘I’ve always been interested in politics. I’ve been an ETU member for around 30 years and an ALP member for 10 years.’

Graham said the Council faces significant challenges due to investments caught up in the global financial crisis.

‘We aim to maintain services to the four towns and 12 villages in the area,’ said Graham, who was active in the local Your Rights at Work campaign.

The ETU has cabins at beautiful Nambucca Heads

Rates start at $300 (low season) and go up to $500 per week for the Christmas school holidays. These modern cabins are fully furnished and air-conditioned and are located at the White Albatross Resort between the surf beach and lagoon. The Resort has a BBQ area, children’s playground, water-play area and half-court tennis located near the cabins. Shops and restaurants are also close by while Coffs Harbour is only 30 minutes drive north.

For further information or if you wish to make a booking please ring Joanne in the Sydney ETU office on 9267 4844.
The ETU is so concerned about widespread bullying and the increasing use of the reviews to sack vulnerable and long-term workers that it is planning a national awareness campaign to alert members and put employers on notice.

More often than not, the targeted employees are on workers compensation or are union delegates. In one particular workplace, every known union delegate is currently on a ‘performance improvement program’ which puts them literally in the firing line.

Regardless of the reasons, there is no doubt some employers are using the reviews to avoid their legal redundancy responsibilities. In most cases the performance meetings or reviews double as the three warnings required for termination.

One ETU member, who asked not to be named for fear of being blacklisted in the industry, told ETU NSW that the practice is blatant and widespread.

‘In some workplaces they make no attempt to disguise it. As a team leader I was sent to a five-day course where one session was referred to as “How to sack people on WorkCover”, and another was “How to performance-manage them out” rather than honour their retrenchment responsibilities and pay proper redundancies.’

‘These schemes have nothing to do with performance or fairness to the worker. They told us things like; this is how you do it without getting caught’.

‘When I saw the ABC’s Four Corners show on Telstra’s performance program, I said, “oh yeah, I know that”.

‘Over 25 years in the industry I’ve worked for most of the major employers and the larger they are the more likely they are to do it.

‘It’s really a demoralising process for the targeted worker. ‘If they don’t resign it doesn’t matter because you’ve taken them through the process and you can then simply sack them.

‘The reviews are usually preceded by written notification of some obscure performance breach followed by the setting of unachievable performance targets.’

Another worker who could not be named told ETU NSW that he was frustrated and fed up.

‘I’m a good worker. I’m highly recommended by my fellow technicians who are always ringing me for help with problems and usually refer their difficult jobs to me,’ said the workplace delegate.

‘I was called in for a performance review and warned, in writing, for not following a new procedure — a procedure which nobody else followed anyway! About a year later I was served a second warning (labelled “second and final warning” which is in contravention of our current EBA) for not returning phone calls and not answering my mobile phone. It’s crazy; we are field technicians and we live in our cars and [this company] won’t supply hands-free kits so how can we answer the phone while we are driving? If we stopped the car for every phone call we’d never make our targets.

‘At one time I solved a major ATM problem for a big client and they sent a letter of thanks and recommendation to my boss which was completely ignored by the review process.

‘This all started after our first child arrived and I couldn’t do extra overtime anymore. They didn’t like that as I was previously working mostly 13-hour days.

‘My health has deteriorated and I haven’t slept properly for months. I’m now on sick leave for stress and expect they’ll sack me when I return. I mean the fact I had accumulated over 400 hours in sick leave shows I was a reliable worker who took very little time off.’

**WE CAN HELP**

What to do if your employer subjects you to a performance review or places you on a performance improvement program:

• Contact your ETU shop steward or workplace delegate immediately
• If you have no workplace delegate phone the ETU office on 02 9267 4844
• Once notified of a meeting organise for your delegate to attend with you
• If it proceeds further contact an ETU organiser immediately
• Never attend a performance assessment or meeting without some form of union representation
• It is crucial to the outcome of any ‘performance review’ to have union representation from the outset!

Employers can, and do, use the first meeting as the first warning towards firing you.

_**UNSCRUPULOUS EMPLOYERS IN THE BUSINESS EQUIPMENT INDUSTRY ARE FLOUTING INDUSTRIAL LAWS AND WORKPLACE AGREEMENTS BY USING SUSPECT PERFORMANCE REVIEWS TO ISOLATE, INTIMIDATE AND TERMINATE WORKERS.**_
NOTICE TO MEMBERS

2009 CONTRIBUTIONS
(JANUARY – JUNE)
ARE NOW DUE

Members who usually save 10% by paying early
are reminded to do so

By the 28th FEBRUARY, 2009

The DISCOUNTED RATES for the first half of 2009 are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rate Description</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADULTS employed as tradesmen or in classifications receiving equal to or in excess of tradesmens rates of pay</td>
<td>$196.23 contributions + $1.50 Distress &amp; Mortality Fund Levy + $19.77 GST</td>
<td>$217.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>NON TRADESMEN &amp; ADULT PROCESS WORKERS employed in classifications receiving less than tradesmens rates of pay</td>
<td>$157.14 Contributions + $1.50 Distress &amp; Mortality Fund Levy + $15.86 GST</td>
<td>$174.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>1ST YEAR APPRENTICE</td>
<td>$37.14 Contributions + $1.50 Distress &amp; Mortality Fund Levy + $3.86 GST</td>
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<td>2nd YEAR APPRENTICE</td>
<td>$64.41 Contributions + $1.50 Distress &amp; Mortality Fund Levy + $6.59 GST</td>
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<td>3rd YEAR APPRENTICE &amp; JUNIOR PROCESS WORKERS</td>
<td>$90.77 Contributions + $1.50 Distress &amp; Mortality Fund Levy + $9.23 GST</td>
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<td>4th YEAR APPRENTICE</td>
<td>$118.95 Contributions + $1.50 Distress &amp; Mortality Fund Levy + $12.05 GST</td>
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DISCOUNTED TICKETS may only be issued to Members who are financial to 31/12/08 and must be taken out by the 28TH February, 2009

CONTRIBUTION RATES
(OTHER THAN DISCOUNTED TICKETS)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENTRANCE FEE IS EXTRA**</th>
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<td>ADULTS employed as tradesmen or in classifications receiving equal to or in excess of tradesmens rates of pay</td>
<td>$217.92 + $1.50 D&amp;M + $22.08 GST</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st Quarter</td>
<td>$108.96 + $1.50 D&amp;M + $11.04 GST</td>
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<tr>
<td>1ST YEAR APPRENTICE</td>
<td>$87.21 + $1.50 D&amp;M + $8.79 GST</td>
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<td>2nd Quarter</td>
<td>$87.21 + $8.79 GST</td>
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<td>2ND YEAR APPRENTICE</td>
<td>$70.78 + $1.50 D&amp;M + $7.22 GST</td>
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<td>1st Quarter</td>
<td>$35.39 + $1.50 D&amp;M + $3.61 GST</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd Quarter</td>
<td>$35.39 + $3.61 GST</td>
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<tr>
<td>3RD YEAR APPRENTICE &amp; JNR PROCESS WORKERS</td>
<td>$100.78 + $1.50 D&amp;M + $10.22 GST</td>
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*Distress and Mortality Levies are paid by all members who join the Union before reaching the age of 50 years.
**Entrance Fees ($11.00 including GST) are PAYABLE by all new members except 1st Year Apprentices

BERNIE RIORDAN, Secretary