

Union of Australian Women  
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After having been approached by Kelly Hoare, M.P., Member for Charlton, we approached Union of Australian Women members if they would like to prepare submissions to the above committee. One of our members, who works for Telstra has prepared the following submission with the assistance of her fellow workers:

Telstra, has become the richest corporation in Australian History. This has been made possible by what Telstra operators see as an unfair tradeoff, technology and profits at the expense of service and jobs. The destruction of full time jobs for operators in Telstra is rampant as the casualisation of the operator workforce increases.

Thankfully, Newcastle operators have been the least effected by this casualisation. Despite this, Newcastle has still lost between 60 and 100 positions over the past decade. Some of these positions have been backfilled with permanent jobs, others with casual jobs. No redundant operator has been re-employed permanently in any area of Telstra. The majority of redundant operators were Australian born, educated women over 45 years of age. Although they were all skilled operators with many years service and would not be considered disadvantaged workers, few have been successful in securing another full time position. Telstra provide seminars on financial matters for those being made redundant. Newcastle operators have experienced difficulty accessing these seminars as they are held in Sydney. Convincing local managers that time and money out of their budgets should be spent ensuring everyone eligible is able to access the seminars is a difficult task.

Retraining is also an option that operators find difficult to access. Technicians in Telstra don't encounter the same difficulty. For operators (predominately female) working out options, learning how to prepare a resume and accessing training for other jobs are activities they pursue privately after separating from Telstra. After leaving Telstra most of the women have discovered that the availability of security, employment opportunities and income security is very limited. Finding an opening into the paid workforce has not been possible for the majority.

Single women, or those who are the family bread-winner have been forced to access their redundancy payout to live. After exhausting these funds some have taken in sewing, laundry and ironing and cleaning as an economic necessity. Could it be said they are self-employed? Technical people (predominantly male) made redundant from Telstra have not experienced the same difficulty in returning to the paid workforce. Communications is a growing area where technological experience is required and valued. The same cannot be said for the skills of the operator. Call centres now require sales-type people, not operators.

The majority of the redundant operators are now either minding grandchildren for working sons or daughters, or doing UNPAID voluntary work. The fact that some of these former operators hold very responsible very busy positions in these voluntary organisations, where they are well respected is proof of their ability, intelligence and commitment. Not all have found other things to do and adjusting to the change has been difficult. They miss the social contact with their work mates, feeling at times depressed and bored. These women describe "not working" as a very negative experience".

All these women take themselves seriously as workers. They feel that the structural changes in the Australian way of work, such as downsizing, privatising and amalgamations deprive them of the chance to

work. Explanations as to why these very capable women find it so difficult to re-enter the paid workforce are not forthcoming. Often they do not even receive a reply to job applications. Employers do not realise or appreciate the full potential of the mature-aged worker, especially if they are female.