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# media release

for immediate release

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Attention: Chief of Staff / News Editor

## **COMPANY FLOUTS AWA REFORMS – UNION STARTS LEGAL ACTION AND CALLS FOR RETROSPECTIVE LEGISLATION**

**The Australian Services Union (ASU) today criticised a taxpayer funded community sector call centre for underhanded tactics which flout the will of the Australian people. The ACE call centre, which is situated in the Prime Minister's own electorate, is continuing to offer AWAs to its staff despite the Rudd government's current efforts to abolish the use of AWAs. The company seems to be in denial that without federal government funding, the ACE call centre wouldn't exist.**

Just one day after Deputy PM Julia Gillard announced the abolition of new AWAs in the federal public service, it was revealed today by the Australian Services Union, that the fully federally funded deaf relay phone service, Australian Communications Exchange (ACE) planned to axe at least 40 jobs in its Melbourne call centre and replace those workers with new staff on AWAs at its existing Brisbane call centre.

Workers already employed in Brisbane, previously covered by a state union collective agreement before the introduction of WorkChoices, have been without a pay rise since 2005, after rejecting a WorkChoices agreement which would have seen a drop in take home pay if accepted. It is believed that the AWAs being offered to new workers closely resemble the previously rejected WorkChoices agreement.

ASU Branch Secretary, Julie Bignell said, "It's thoroughly disgraceful that this company can use taxpayers' money to continue to push a clearly ideological line that has to date deprived our members of a pay increase and now seeks to go further by exploiting new staff who will get less pay for the same work. The reduction in pay and conditions was soundly rejected already by current staff. Now, despite the overwhelming rejection of WorkChoices by the Australian public and the clear intent of the government to abolish this unfair system, the company is seeking to take advantage of the delay caused by the Opposition who refuse to pass the regulation that reflects the will of the people. And on top of this outrage, we're all paying their legal bill through the federal grant which is meant to be used for providing services to the deaf community."

"If this mob is doing the wrong thing then you can bet that others are doing it. The Rudd government should act swiftly to ensure federally funded organisations do not offer AWAs and when the legislation finally does get passed in July it should be made retrospective. That way, the incentive for employers to employ mean and tricky tactics like this whilst the Opposition buys them time is removed and workers' rights cannot be further undermined," she said.

The Australian Services Union today lodged action in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission seeking a declaration that ACE is not a constitutional corporation. If successful, the company will be forced to abandon its WorkChoices activities and revert to the State system, which does not allow AWAs to over-ride other agreements or awards.

**For comment:** Julie Bignell, ASU Secretary 0404 820 627