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## National Labour News

**More than 5000 jobs have been lost** in the New Zealand fishing industry over the past decade, with the vast majority relocated to processing plants in Third World countries, said Etu's National Industry Strategy Director (Food), Neville Donaldson. In addition, he asserted Kiwi fishing companies use migrants in local processing and fishing because they can offer them minimum employment conditions "and they won't complain." "This runs down employment standards for everyone," said Neville. The union urged regulations that require 75 per cent of fishing industry staff at local fishing companies to be New Zealand citizens or permanent residents. The recommendations were included in a detailed submission on the Ministry of Primary Industries review document, the Future of our Fisheries. Neville challenged fishing companies which he said complain that local workers don't want jobs in the industry which means they have to hire migrants. "Families can't live on the pay offered for working on boats or in local plants. Instead, migrants are being hired for minimum pay on temporary permits," he said. The entire country has a stake in the fishing industry, Neville said, and the industry has a responsibility to provide decent, secure jobs for fishing workers.

**St John NZ ambulance services** cut the pay of protesting workers by 10 per cent on Christmas Eve. Ambulance officers have been taking industrial strike action against St John, which includes a uniform ban. They have been wearing protest t-shirts reading "Healthy Ambos Save Lives". FIRST union, which represents staff, said St John's actions were "diabolical." The service claimed the deductions were imposed because workers should be wearing a St John high viz vest for safety reasons. "If St John is worried about health and safety then they wouldn't force ambulance officers to work nine hours without a break and they wouldn't send single-crewed ambulances to emergencies," said FIRST Union spokesperson Jared Abbot. Staff recently entered their third month of action over growing workloads and "mismanagement at the top."

**Latest government figures, which** showed an increase of 1.1 per cent in the three months to September, in the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) "look good on paper (but) don't tell the whole story," warned the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions. CTU Economist Bill Rosenberg said the figures "hide the reality" that too many working Kiwis are struggling to make ends meet. "While GDP increased 1.1 per cent over the three months to September, and 3.0 per cent year on year, it doesn't do much to improve our living standards and doesn't make life fairer," he said. He estimated that labour productivity fell 1.6 per cent compared to the previous year and 0.2 per cent in the three months to September alone. "In the long run, wages cannot rise sustainably if productivity is falling," Rosenberg said. He warned that the economy is still in "a low wage, low value trap." He urged the Government to move the economy away from low wage industries such as tourism and low value commodity exports like milk powder and logs towards higher value goods and services. "We need employers much more committed to raising the skills of the people they employ. We need good employment law that ensures that the income that is created by higher productivity flows into wages and salaries," Rosenberg said.

## National, Economic & Political Events

A recent national poll showed that support for National fell to 45 per cent at the start of December with a potential Labour/Green Party alliance at 43 per cent, up 5.5 per cent. According to the Roy Morgan Research poll, support for the National partners also was down with the Maori Party down 0.5 per cent at 1 per cent, Act NZ fell 0.5 per cent to 0.5 per cent and United Future was down 0.5 per cent to 0 per cent. The survey contacted 872 Kiwis between November 28 and December 11. "If new PM Bill English is to successfully contest next year's New Zealand election and win a fourth term for the National Government he will need to come up with new policies in the area of Housing to convince New Zealand electors he deserves his own mandate as prime minister," Roy Morgan executive chairman Gary Morgan said of the results. He noted that housing is the biggest issue in New Zealand with concerns about affordability, prices and homelessness among the highest worries of Kiwis.

A new report commissioned by six non-governmental organisations (NGOs) revealed widespread worker exploitation and abuse among migrant workers. The organisations called on the government to do more to prevent human trafficking. The report, "Worker exploitation in New Zealand: a troubling landscape", uncovered a pattern of modern-day slavery among many Kiwi industries including hospitality, construction and dairy. The research was conducted by Dr Christina Stringer of Auckland University who interviewed 105 people over two years. Her study revealed reports of low pay, verbal and physical abuse and excessive work hours without breaks. Stringer said many temporary migrants put up with exploitation so they can get permanent residency, or because they were forced or lied to by their employer. Workers interviewed in the construction industry, for example, reported entering into debt bondages to pay recruitment fees of about \$10,000 each. Stand Against Slavery chief executive Peter Mihaere, one of the report sponsors, urged further action in both public and private sectors for New Zealand "to be exploitation and slavery free."

## International Labour News

**U.S. unions braced for** an all-out attack on collective bargaining from the in-coming Trump Administration. Even prior to the election, former House Speaker and close Trump advisor Newt Gingrich warned on NBC's "Meet the Press" that the country will end up looking like Madison, (WI) with the assault on labour unions from a Trump Administration. "If Trump is elected," he said, "it will just be like Madison, Wisconsin, with (Gov.) Scott Walker. The opposition of the government employee unions will be so hostile and so direct and so immediate, there will be a continuing fight over who controls the country." In a message shortly after the election AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka made an emotional appeal to union members and their supporters "to be more committed than ever to helping everyone win a voice on the job and in our democracy."

**Australia's Shop, Distributive** and Allied Employees Association urged the New South Wales government to reverse a change in the law which allows retail shops to open on Boxing Day without having to apply for an exemption as long as employees volunteer to work. The law was changed last year. According to the union, only one in four workers it surveyed did not freely elect to work. "The reality is that retail employees feel significant pressure to work Boxing Day from their managers, when saying 'no' runs the risk of having your hours cut," SDA NSW secretary Bernie Smith said in a statement. "Our shops are already open almost 360.5 days of the year and the sales will still be there on 27 December." He said the new law is ruining Christmas for workers. "The top of retail workers' wish list this Christmas is two days off: Christmas and Boxing Day," he said. "It's a simple solution: close the shops and let everybody celebrate Christmas and Boxing Day with their families."

**Effective January 1, workers** in France achieved the legal right to avoid work emails outside working hours. The new law, called the "right-to-disconnect," affects workers at companies with more than 50 employees. These companies are now required to implement a "charter of good conduct" specifying hours when staff are not supposed to send or answer emails or text messages. The law's supporters said workers expected to check and reply to emails outside normal work hours were not being fairly paid for their overtime. The practice also contributes to stress, burnout, sleep problems and relationship difficulties. The new law was part of a set of new labour laws introduced in May which also made it easier for firms to hire and fire workers.

**According to news reports**, China's Foxconn, Apple and Samsung supplier, has reportedly replaced 60,000 factory workers with robots. A government official told the South China Morning Post that one factory had "reduced employee strength from 110,000 to 50,000 thanks to the introduction of robots." Xu Yulian, head of publicity for the Kunshan region, added, "More companies are likely to follow suit." Foxconn Technology Group, which has been the target of increased worker actions in recent years, confirmed to the BBC that it was automating "many of the manufacturing tasks associated with our operations" but denied that it meant long-term job losses. Economists have issued warnings about how automation affects the job market with some suggesting 35 per cent of jobs at risk over the next 20 years. At the same time, incidents of labour unrest in China are increasing. The China Labour Bulletin reported 2944 strikes in 2015, compared to only 185 in 2011.

## Regional and Local Union News

**Stacey Postlewaith, a 19-year old** Unite union member, won \$1200 backpay from McDonald's for not being rostered on for three consecutive weeks. According to Unite, Postlewaith, who works at a McDonald's in West Auckland, should have been rostered 24.5 hours per week under the secure hours system in the collective agreement. But the union successfully argued that she was removed from the roster at her store after trying to reduce her availability to work for McDonald's because she secured a second job. "This sort of thing used to be more common with fast food companies casually making dramatic cuts to workers' hours or taking them off the roster completely in response to worker's wanting to reduce their availability to work for them. Now workers can reclaim backpay if they are rostered less than their secure hours number," explained Gary Cranston, Unite West Auckland & Northland Fast Food Organiser. He reported Unite is taking legal action against McDonald's for failing to follow legislation introduced to ban the use of Zero Hour contracts in New Zealand. "The union has found that McDonald's are putting many new staff on three-hour minimum contracts and refusing to pay compensation for being available to work additional shifts as required by the law. The company is also refusing to offer hours to existing staff before hiring new staff," he said.

**Unions representing medical** personnel at Christchurch Hospital are demanding much higher rates of pay to cover junior doctors who plan to strike January 17-20. Senior doctors want up to \$568 an hour. The Association of Salaried Medical Specialists is also calling for \$340 an hour for doctors working without the normal level of support they would have with resident doctors. The average rate for doctors is about \$80-\$90 depending on their position, the union said. "It is a jump, but they are under considerable pressure. It is a very unusual position," said Association executive director Ian Powel. Junior doctors held a 48-hour strike in October. They are taking action over being made to work unsafe hours 12 days in a row and night shifts of seven days in a row. The New Zealand Resident Doctors' Association wants the maximum number of days worked in a row cut to 10, and the number of night shifts reduced to four without a reduction in pay. The NZRDA and the DHB's meanwhile, continue to negotiate.

**A bus driver who was sacked** over a \$2.90 fare was awarded nearly \$20,000 in compensation by the Employment Relations Authority (ERA). Dunedin Go BusBo Bus driver Kevin Hellyer was fired after an undercover inspector saw him allowing his wife onto a bus without paying because she had forgotten her wallet. Hellyer said he failed to remember to reimburse the \$2.90 fare. The ERA said the company should have applied its "benefit of the doubt policy towards Hellyer (as it did to other employees in similar situations) which would have warranted only a warning for this breach but not the defendant's dismissal." The Authority concluded Hellyer was unfairly fired because he was branch president of the Tramways Union which was involved in collective negotiations with the company. The employment court doubled the amount Go Bus in Dunedin had to pay Hellyer, saying it had "wrongly branded him as a thief and a fraudster".