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New Zealand Labour News

Over 4,000 public servants with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and Inland Revenue Department (IRD) walked off the job for two hours July 16 and 23 in the first cross-department action in many years. The limited strike was called by the Public Service Association (PSA) after workers voted for the two stoppages. According to PSA, pay negotiations have been underway since late 2017. PSA secretary Glenn Barclay told the news media that MBIE's last "offer" was for many employees to work longer hours for the same pay. He also said workers were struggling to meet targets after changes to performance-based systems. Barclay said the changes were "deeply dispiriting" for workers who were being given targets that many were struggling to meet. He added that it might take 20 years to move to a pay rate that reflects a worker is "fully competent." IRD's pay offer did not take account of cost of living increases and a major technology overhaul was "a mess," making life difficult for staff, Barclay said. He criticized the department for undertaking "job change and job loss before really embedding the technology change, before knowing how the change was going to pan out for people."

The Rail and Maritime Transport Union harshly criticized KiwiRail for its plans to replace electric locomotives with DL class diesel trains imported from China and to abandon electrification on the North Island Main Trunk Line. The union called on Labour and the Greens parties to honour their pre-election promises "to overturn this decision and support further electrification of New Zealand's rail network." The union noted KiwiRail Chief Executive Peter Reidy recently signed the CEO Climate Change Statement, along with the bosses of Fonterra, Z Energy and others, which RMTU General Secretary Wayne Butson called "a cynical public relations manoeuvre." "This polygamous marriage of convenience

between a gaggle of New Zealand's worst polluters may impress some people, but rail workers are not so easily fooled," he said. Butson said KiwiRail's use of diesel locomotives on currently electrified rail tracks will burn an extra eight million litres of diesel per year, spewing an additional 12,000 tons of carbon dioxide per year into the atmosphere. "This diesel deal is dirty in every sense of the word - if only it was being done dirt cheap," he said.

The recent nationwide strike by 30,000 nurses, midwives and healthcare assistants July 13 has far-reaching ramifications for workers and labour, said many observers. The 24-hour job action, the first nationwide strike by public hospital workers since 1989, has been hailed as a long over-due push back by working Kiwis who have endured a decade of slow wage growth and austerity measures enforced by nine years of the previous National government. According to media reports, demonstrations and pickets were held throughout the country, with hundreds attending in Auckland and Wellington. More than 1,000 health workers and supporters joined a march in Christchurch. There were well-attended pickets in Dunedin, Hamilton, Napier, Nelson, New Plymouth, Timaru, Invercargill, Whangarei and many other towns. A majority of New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) members have rejected four offers, the most recent one included a pay rise of 3 per cent per year. Negotiations with District Health Boards, which have dragged on for a year, resumed with no progress reported.

National, Economic & Political Events

Perpetual Guardian, a New Zealand-based firm which handles trusts, wills, and estates, recently implemented a reduced four-day workweek which resulted in improved quality of work and productivity. The firm, which employs about 240 people, cut the workweek to 32 hours from 40 in March and April of this year and kept paying employees for 40. Two researchers were asked to study the effects. "Supervisors said staff were more creative, their attendance was better, they were on time, and they didn't leave early or take long breaks," said Jarrod Haar, a human resources professor at Auckland University of Technology. "Their actual job performance didn't change when doing it over four days instead of five." He added employees reported a 24 percent improvement in work-life balance and came back to work energized after their days off. Researchers said employees found ways to cut out time-wasting activity, like cutting two-hour meetings to 30 minutes or setting up signals so co-workers knew they needed to work undisturbed. The experiment was such a success that Perpetual Guardian is weighing making the change permanent.

Strike action is growing in New Zealand after years of stagnant wage growth. Public workers, nurses, teachers and other union workers have all taken or threatened walkouts. Workers are pushing for larger pay settlements than were seen under the National-led governments of the past nine years. Economic experts said those on lower incomes were bypassed by recent economic growth and had not shared in an economy which they could see was booming for others. "It's been pretty tough going for a lot of those people at the lower end of the income scale. The New Zealand economy's doing very well, but a lot of people are asking, 'where's the payoff for me?'," said ASB bank's Mark Smith. He said the spoils of New Zealand's recent growth had not been shared evenly. Cameron Bagrie, the former chief economist of ANZ bank, also expects pressure by workers to increase. "The ante's gonna get

pped pretty significantly. Other industry groups are going to be licking their chops. The nurses and teachers are going to be a bit of a benchmark, and the risk here that we're going to see more than one form of strike, we're going to see two," he said.

Employers should make the most of their older workforce or face dire consequences in the future, warned the Employers and Manufacturers Association (EMA) in a recent white paper. Paul Jarvie, EMA employment relations and safety manager, said research shows that people over age 48 find it difficult to find jobs. "The code is: 'we will call you back'," he said. The white paper, "Act Now Age Later: Unlocking the Potential of our Ageing Workforce," warned those businesses that ignore older people will struggle in the future to find enough workers to grow or even carry out day-to-day functions. New Zealand has an ageing workforce and a "car crash" is waiting to happen, the EMA predicted. In New Zealand, nearly one in three workers is already over 55. By 2066, the group between 40 and 64 will overtake those aged 15 to 39. "Middle managers could find themselves doing process jobs because there is no one else to do it. It will limit expansion of businesses if they can't get the labour they need. It will force some to adopt technology faster because they don't have enough people to do the job. That is already happening in some sectors," said Jarvie.

International Labour News

Australia's Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) charged at least 80 per cent of the workforce on the Pacific Highway upgrade between Woolgoolga to Ballina are casual workers and have no access to holiday pay. The government project is the country's largest regional infrastructure project. CFMEU northern NSW organiser Dean Rielly told the news media the failure of contractor Pacific Complete to hire permanent staff was having major ramifications on workers and the local community. "When the Federal Government announced this multi-billion-dollar project, local workers had a right to feel elated at the possibility of the creation of jobs in regional NSW," Rielly said. "Instead the local workforce has been locked out with the vast majority of workers on the highway job working away from home or relocated from other parts of the state." He said local workers are offered sub-standard casual work and often paid the wrong rate. Workers also are denied holiday pay and sick leave, he said. "These workers have bills to pay and the reliance by Pacific Complete on a casual workforce means they cannot take time off because they will not be paid and may lose the work altogether. Casual workers are also unable to get home or car loans and are not able to improve their financial situation," Rielly declared.

Four U.S. national unions, among the largest in the nation, rallied in Pittsburgh recently, a month after the historic U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Janus vs. AFSCME* that banned unions from collecting a portion of collective bargaining fees from non-members covered by the collective agreement. The decision is expected to deeply hurt the finances of public-sector unions. Lee Saunders, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Lily Eskelsen-Garcia, president of the National Education Association, and Mary Kay Henry, president of the Service Employees International Union spoke together at the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) convention. They were introduced by AFT President Randi Weingarten. They reported the unions have intensified outreach efforts to ensure non-

members continue to contribute fees that cover the costs of bargaining and enforcing contracts. "Our four great unions enjoy indestructible bonds of solidarity," said AFSCME head Lee Saunders. "There is no daylight between us, not even an inch. And that's never been more important than it is now."

According to the International Trade Union Confederation's recently released Global Rights Index for 2018, the Philippines are among the top 10 worse countries across the globe for observing workers' rights. The report charged the Philippines has "no guarantee of rights due to the breakdown of law." The Centre for Trade Union and Human Rights (CTUHR), a local labour rights group, said the report "re-validated" their findings that the "Duterte administration is no different from the previous governments or even worse in its attacks against the rights of Filipino workers." News reports said CTUHR recorded 29 victims of extrajudicial killings in the labour sector from June 2016 to March 2018. About 3,345 individuals whose labour rights have been violated were documented by the CTUHR in 133 cases. These include "809 victims of red-tagging, 358 victims of threat, harassments and intimidation and 98 victims of arbitrary arrest and detention resulting from filing trumped up criminal charges." Leaders of various workers organizations have scheduled "A Workers' March" August 27 in an effort to mobilize thousands of workers to highlight their grievances and demands.

Regional and Local Union News

The announcement that Nestle New Zealand will sell Mackintosh's, Heards, Black Knight and Fabulicious Red Licorice is a "bolt from the blue", said E t? union which represents the workers. The company also proposed selling Life Savers and Oddfellows to private equity company, Quadrant. According to news reports, the brands will still be made in New Zealand, but manufacturing will move to Levin. The decision means job losses at Nestle's Wiri-based factory in Auckland. E t? Industry Coordinator for Manufacturing and Food Phil Knight said the union asked Nestle six months ago whether there were plans to sell-off product lines and cut staff in New Zealand, following international closures. "We were assured there were no plans to do any of that in New Zealand," he said. "Not only is this the opposite of what we were told, but we weren't invited to the meetings they held with our members late yesterday afternoon to deliver this news, prior to the public announcement." Nestle's decision comes soon after the closure of the Cadbury factory in Dunedin and the announcement of future job losses at Griffins and Kraft Heinz Watties.

Unite union held a picket line protest at McDonald's in Glen Innes July 13 to protest racist and discriminatory hiring policies "that harm both migrant workers and local people." Unite Union organiser Joe Carolan said local people are "desperate" for jobs. "There is huge unemployment of Maori, PI, Pakeha and other groups in Glen Innes, yet seven new hires this week in McDonald's Lunn Avenue all come from only one ethnic group, the same ethnic group as the anti-union store manager," he said. "This is part of a systematic hiring policy that makes a mockery of McDonald's claims to be an equal opportunities employer." He reported that local delegates are Fijian Indian and Maori and "they are furious that there is not even one other worker from another ethnic background" and joined supporters on the picket

line. "This discrimination hurts both local people and the migrant workers hired - because the reason they are hired is that they are in a situation of dependency and feel unable to speak out when their rights are violated. These workers routinely miss out on breaks, have their hours cut without warning, and are victims of petty workplace bullying," asserted Carolan.