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Dear Member,

## NEW ZEALAND LABOUR NEWS

As we kick off 2020 and a new year of hope for New Zealand's working families, many are still struggling for the most basic of rights and security.

### **Cotton On Blindsides Workers**

Multinational chain Cotton On abruptly closed two stores in Porirua's North City Shopping Centre, which were given only days notice of the closing of their workplaces, and are now boarded up and inaccessible. The closure of Cotton On Kids is expected to follow.

While some staff have been offered redeployment within a 30km radius, they are unsure of what redundancy will be available to them, or when they would begin new roles.

"This was short-notice, impulsive, solely profit-focused and insensitive to long-serving staff," said organiser Richie Morris, who works for **FIRST Union**, which represents the workers.



*A living wage banner hangs in Manukau Westfield Shopping Centre (FIRST Union)*

Cotton On workers have been calling for a living wage for over a year, but the company has not returned to the bargaining table for the last four months.

Last month retail workers demonstrated outside the company's busiest stores across the country, calling for a living wage and wearing t-shirts saying, "Cotton H(on)est - Living Wage." Distribution centre staff have also carried out full or partial strike actions, after exhausting other cooperative avenues.

"Let's be clear -- Cotton On are the largest global retailer in Australia, and they turned over more than \$2 billion AUD in the last financial year. They have a workforce of 22,000 people across 18 countries, and every day they choose not to pay them a fair wage." said FIRST Union Secretary Tali Williams.

### **Petone Imperial Tobacco Closes After A Century**

On 13 February, 122 Imperial Tobacco workers in Petone will find out if the cigarette manufacturer, which has been operating there for a century, will be closing its doors.



*Imperial Tobacco Company in  
Petone*

**E tu**, which represents a majority of the workers, recently learned that the plant's global parent company, Imperial Brands, has proposed closing the operation. The reason for the proposed closure, according to management, is decreased consumer demand.

Kirsten Daggar-Nickson, head of corporate and legal affairs for Imperial Brands, said the employees "are hard-working members of our family and we are focused on making sure that we make this transition as easy as possible on them."

"We are meeting with our members to guide them through the process and working with the company to ensure our people are well-looked after a final decision, said E tu organiser Damon Rongotaua.

### **Home Support Workers Still Struggle Despite Settlement**

Two years after a historic equal pay settlement ended long term pay discrimination against home support workers, many are still struggling for job security and adequate resources.

Union members, represented by the **Public Service Association (PSA)**, say there has been a refusal at high levels to properly fund and implement guaranteed hours of work, travel between clients and the equal pay settlement, and as a result the provider companies they work for make up the shortfall with cutbacks.

The Public Service Association represents home support workers, who are employed by various private companies and not-for-profits on behalf of District Health Boards (DHBs), the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) and the Ministry of Health.

"Our members fought bravely for many years to not only improve their own pay and conditions but to improve the care and support received by their clients. It is outrageous and against the intentions of the 2017 equal pay settlement that some support workers now tell us they are worse off than before, because their guaranteed hours have been cut or not properly implemented." -- Kerry Davies, National Secretary of the PSA.

Employment law changes and a \$2 billion government package in the wake of the 2017 equal pay settlement ensured pay rises of up to 50%, guarantees of regular hours and compensation for travel time between clients.



**PSA Campaigns (Click)**

The PSA says it was always the responsibility of the DHBs, ACC and the Ministry of Health to ensure adequate funding for the costs of improved pay and conditions. However, the union claims they have taken "a bandaid approach, rather than living up to their end of the bargain...Our members have shown the patience of saints, but we're over it."

The PSA calls on the provider organisations and applicable government funding sections to meet with home support workers as soon as possible in order to systematic resolution of the problems.

### **Unite to the Rescue of Chinese Workers**

New Zealand currently has a quarter of a million workers on temporary work visas, so it is no surprise that a group of approximately 50 construction workers from China were recent victims of a scam that

promised them visas and jobs in New Zealand in exchange for \$50,000.



**Immigration Minister Iain Lees-Galloway promises fair treatment (Unite)**

While the workers, represented by **Unite Union**, were successful in their court case against National Personnel Limited, the settlement for each does not compare to the amount the workers lost, and now some are still being deported.

Four of the Chinese workers, who cooperated fully with Immigration New Zealand (INZ) when the agency sought their assistance in the fraud investigation, have now been told to leave the country -- despite having an employer willing to keep them on.

Mike Treen, National Director for Unite Union, said the workers were promised fair treatment by the Immigration Minister, who said he would ensure they could change their employer and get new visas.

"We don't think that's fair. I think there's a moral responsibility to facilitate every one of that group to be able to stay - at least three years, to give them a chance to recoup the money...We need a special agency, independent of Immigration **NZ**, which is dedicated to enforcing their rights, rather than just prosecuting the occasional really bad employer."

The government agency actually responsible for enforcing minimum standards is The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Enterprise (MBIE). But Immigration **NZ** is part of MBIE and, according to Treen, "seems to have different priorities."

## INTERNATIONAL LABOUR NEWS

### **Newfoundland's Women Apprentices' Model Goes National**

The **Office to Advance Women Apprentices (OAWA)**, which has successfully found work for 1,300 women in Newfoundland, is assisting others to set up offices in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the rest of Atlantic Canada.

While the national average of women in under-represented trades is three to four per cent, in Newfoundland that number is between 13 to 14 per cent - up about 10 per cent since the OAWA was founded a decade ago.

Along with the building trades, under-represented trades include such fields as auto-body/auto repair and food preparation. Since its founding, OAWA has helped 174 of its women achieve Red Seal Certifications, with more in line to receive their certifications in the next year or two.

One of the ways women break the myth that their gender doesn't belong in the industry is by proving "over and over again" on the jobsite that they can do the same work as the men, said Karen Walsh, Executive Director of the OAWA. Women are still an untapped resource in the province.



*(Daily Commercial News)*

While mentorship is a key to its success, Walsh said the office reaches out to medium-sized companies and contractors and unions to help them with inclusion plans, and hold networking sessions and roundtables to help the women they employ stay in the trade of their choice.

OAWA has partnered with the Canadian Building Trades Union to develop offices in Manitoba,

Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia this year. In Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, it has partnered with the Atlantic Canada Regional Council of Carpenters, Millwrights and Allied Workers. Funding is provided by the federal government under the Union Innovation Training Fund.

### **Chile Labour In Revolt**

Social unrest has rocked Chile for months, with civil protests in response to a raise in the Metro's subway fare, the increased cost of living, privatisation and social and economic inequality throughout the country.



**Thousands marched in San Antonio, Chile during a November general strike** (Vivian Morales C.)

The protests began in Chile's capital, Santiago, as a coordinated fare evasion campaign by students which led to spontaneous takeovers of the city's main train stations and open confrontations with the Carabineros de Chile (the national police force). More than two dozen have been killed and over 2,500 injured.

Representatives of the Social Unity Board, a collective of social and labour groups who were behind many of the calls to protest, met with members of President Sebastian Pinera's conservative government in late November.

Among the collective's members is the Workers' United Center of Chile, the most powerful union in the country, the teacher's union and the "NO+AFP" group, which calls for an end to Chile's private pension system. They have pushed for, among other things, an improved and public healthcare system.

Despite the push by labour, most workers in Chile have no union. More than 40 per cent of jobs are not covered under any labour legislation and collective bargaining agreements cover just 20 per cent of workers.

Pinera's government has announced a raft of reforms to end the crisis, including an agreement to call a national referendum in April 2020 regarding the creation of a new constitution.

### **Modern Slavery: More Than 40 Million People Exploited Across The World**

The latest Global Slavery Index shows that there are over 40.3 million people living or working under conditions of slavery -- a population larger than Canada.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Asia and the Pacific region is home to the second largest number of people working in these situations, at a rate of 6.1 per 1000 people, behind Africa.

The force driving modern slavery is hugely lucrative business - behind only arms smuggling and drug trafficking - which the IOM values at 150 billion dollars per year.

These figures do not account for those people suffering similar conditions in conflict zones, on migration routes or in remote areas that are difficult to access.



**Protesting modern slavery in London** (Alan Fraser)

Given this landscape, achieving the sustainable development goal of eradicating modern slavery by 2030 would seem close to impossible. "There has to be a shift in attitude and culture. As long as human beings continue to exploit their neighbors, it will be very difficult," said Luiz Antonio Machada of the ILO.

### **Big Pharma to Blame for High Prescription Costs**

As debates around drug prices heat up on the presidential campaign trail, the US House of Representatives voted in December to pass Speaker Nancy Pelosi's drug bill, which contains key

provisions allowing the government to negotiate lower prices on at least 50 drugs each year.

This would come as a welcome relief to Americans who pay more per capita for prescription drugs than their wealthy global peers. Many, however, believe the Republican-controlled Senate is likely to bury the bill in deference to pharmaceutical industry lobbyists that argue prices must be kept high in order for firms to invest in new drugs through expanded research and development programs.



*(Yulia Reznikov)*

According to economists who research how drug companies allocate money, this is far from the truth. One study shows that from 2010 to 2016, National Institute of Health (NIH) funding contributed to published research associated with every single one of the 210 new drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration during those years. Yet in return for this largesse, American taxpayers still see drug prices climb each year.

The idea that the public must choose between innovation and high drug prices is a false one. The status quo is unhealthy for anyone except pharmaceutical company executives. Drug companies need a new business model that gets them back into the business of making the drugs Americans need at prices they can all afford to pay.

### **Courts Block State Laws Aimed at Protecting Workers**

Groundbreaking state laws aimed at improving worker conditions have been blocked by courts, just as they were set to take effect early this year.

In New York, a judge temporarily blocked parts of a law that provides new protections for agricultural workers; in California, the trucking industry successfully fended off enforcement of a new test for determining when a worker is a contractor; and a separate California law that would limit mandatory arbitration agreements was similarly halted.

In the labour and employment realm, state and local laws have been passed at a rapid clip, particularly in progressive states like New York, California, and Massachusetts, to supplement long-dormant federal laws that govern the workplace. A slew of new measures are set to take effect this year, including laws to reclassify thousands of gig workers as employees, raise minimum wages in half the states, and increase salary thresholds for white-collar overtime pay exemptions.

Major industry groups have filed lawsuits to limit enforcement of some of these statutes, arguing they are preempted by federal law, or are trying to carve out certain industries from compliance mandates.

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