

Scrap the new laws

National's proposed changes to employment rights add up to a worse deal for the whole working class. By seeking to extend the 90 day "sack at will" law, restrict union access rights and more, National is acting as a representative of the capitalist class. For this class, there has been no recession (CEO pay went up 13% last year), but no matter how much they squeeze out of the workers, it is never enough.

Key justifies his government's latest onslaught by claiming increased "flexibility" – code for tilting the balance of power in the workplace further in the bosses' favour. His comments about the proposals being "moderate" compared to other countries with longer trial periods, for instance, are simply a warning that further attacks may lurk around the corner.

But the u-turn on mining conservation land has shown that we can force Key to back off. After 40,000 greenies marched through Auckland, he lost his bottle. So, if a good chunk of the 400,000 unionised workers can be mobilised (together with their potential allies in non-union sites), we have a realistic chance of blowing these changes out of the water.

Our first objective should be to scrap the new laws. Along with rallies and protests there are other collective actions workers could take. One such action is a nation-wide sick day.

If the government manages to bring in some or all of the proposals, there are specific forms of resistance that can neutralise their effect. The limits on union access to worksites are mainly directed against organisers coming on to "greenfield" sites where there are no members, primarily in the private sector. Unions need to raise the alarm as soon as any organiser is obstructed, and rally

en masse in protest at the "mongrel" employer's site. We need to renew the old slogan: An injury to one is an injury to all!

To new start workers worried about the "sack at will" law, we need to get the message out that being part of a union is your best insurance against arbitrary treatment at the hands of the boss. A Collective Agreement should nullify the 90 day law, but ununionised sites will need to get organised.

One of the most underreported, yet sinister, elements of the proposals is for "Bargaining Agents" to be allowed to take the place of unions in negotiating Collective Agreements. If bosses try to promote in-house "yellow unions" at the expense of bone fide unions, they need to be immediately and loudly exposed. Unions must be seen as campaigning organisations rather than simply advocates at negotiations to stop being usurped by corporate lawyers and other parasites.

Some union leaders (and one or two employers) have opposed the government's plans on the basis of "it ain't broke, don't fix it" - that the current set-up of employment relations works just fine. Well, the fact is, that there's precious little justice for workers as it is. The Personal Grievance system is totally inadequate, and rarely results in reinstatement, even if we manage to prove a worker was unfairly dismissed.

The Employment Relations Act, brought in by Labour to replace the hated Contracts Act, was an 80% re-write of the previous law. Labour retained the ban on strikes for political and social issues, which makes it harder for us to organise resistance against the current attacks.

The Workers Party doesn't want to defend the status quo – we say let's go on the offensive for the unrestricted right to strike and real freedom at work. Laws that are unjust deserve to be broken.

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