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NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL OF TRADE UNIONS

www.union.org.nz

Te Kauae Kaimahi

21 July 2010

Hon John Key
Prime Minister
Parliament Buildings
Freepost 18 888
Wellington

Dear John,

I wrote to you last week outlining my concerns with both the process and substance issue relating to the most recent announcements in industrial relations. Subsequently we have read your speech to the National Party conference and after a request, received some information from the Minister of Labour. It is not true that you and I have discussed these issues as you reported on National Radio. At my initiative we had a brief discussion at the end of a function we both happened to be attending. At that stage you were reluctant to even confirm the information I had about worker access to unions and you certainly did not tell me of the extent of the proposed changes you were announcing.

As you no doubt are aware, our executive is meeting on Thursday night to discuss these issues, the way they were announced and what that means both in terms of our campaign against them but also any ongoing relationship with your government. On the issues – we oppose them. They show a disregard for the working people of this country. They paint a picture of workers as lazy, untrustworthy skivers that are out of control and need to be disciplined. Workers are painted as acting deceitfully when applying for positions (so 90 days are important), taking sickies, misusing union membership and a range of other complete generalisations that demean the people we work with every day. Employers on the other hand are painted as generally fair minded people that will use all powers reasonably.

Apart from the slur on working people, this analysis disregards the fact that many employers are not “fair-minded individuals” but corporate entities that employ CEOs and managers to maximize profit. We work with global corporate entities in this country who comply with a wide range of minimum standards and regulations which make their work practices decent here. These same corporates operate in unregulated economies employing people under atrocious conditions. This is not a test of “good and evil”. It is a

test of fairness, decency and respect. Those that are respectful employers do not need these changes – those that aren't do.

On the process, you have heard what I think of this. The fact the process was so bad and includes a direct attack on the role of unions makes the lack of process more sinister in my view, particularly in light of the conversations we have had about these issues in the past. We are considering what all this means for the role of the CTU and Unions in terms of this Government.

Let me be clear on this. The substance of the attacks on work rights is the main issue here. But an additional factor is the process. What you said to both Peter and me in your office was that union access and non-union collective bargaining were off the agenda and if that changed you would talk to us. You have breached that undertaking. You also said you wanted to work with the unions. Of course this was at a time of a deepening recession but we thought it was a longer term intention. And you portrayed yourself as a moderating influence in employment law matters. That has changed. Some matters such as 'communication' in collective bargaining have not been raised as a policy issue at all with the CTU by the Minister of Labour despite very regular meetings.

This letter is really one for the record. Your announcements at the National Party Conference, if enacted will have far reaching ramifications for workers in this country. They send a strong message of your understanding of working life and the values of your Government. We will campaign strongly against them.

I am formally requesting that you do not implement these changes to the Employment Relations Act and the Holidays Act.

I also seek your views on the direction you think the relationship should now take and on any other matters raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Helen Kelly
President