

Summary

**Labour's Policy for
Employment
Relations**

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Since its earliest days, Labour has had the protection of workers' rights as a founding value. Labour believes in the right of workers to a liveable wage, freedom from unreasonable and unfair treatment in the workplace and the right of all workers to bargain collectively. These core beliefs have continued to be reflected in the work Labour has done and continues to do on behalf of all workers.

Security in Times of Change

New Zealand has enjoyed a decade of good news in the economy and in employment. We have seen an unemployment rate of below 4 per cent over the past four years, an achievement right-wing politicians of the 1990s told New Zealanders simply couldn't be done. With the New Zealand economy now facing challenges from the global financial turbulence and economic slowdown, Labour can be trusted to give impetus to our economy, ensure that New Zealand jobs are kept safe wherever possible, and protect workers' interests where change is unavoidable.

Labour will enhance employment law to provide for statutory minimum standards for redundancy.

Labour will encourage notification to government agencies of potential or upcoming redundancy situations.

Labour will implement more active labour market policies and programmes which provide security and support for workers in a changing economy.

Labour will introduce a new retraining allowance, on the same basis as a student allowance, but with no spousal income test, for workers who have been in the workforce for at least five years and have been made redundant.

Labour will also introduce a retraining allowance available to those who have been in the workforce for ten years and wish to upgrade their skills or retrain in a new area.

Labour will ensure that the Employment Relations Act does not prevent workers from being able to take strike action, if necessary, when employers initiate restructuring/outsourcing which undermines a collective agreement, during the term of that agreement.

Labour will work with firms to help them access the services they need to improve their productivity.

Collective Negotiations

This decade has seen sweeping changes to the way employment relations are regulated, with the repeal of the oppressive Employment Contracts Act, enacted the decade before. Under the old Employment Contracts Act, union membership more than halved because the law at the time was focused on individuals having to bargain directly with their employer. The benefit of shared conditions is that workers within sectors have greater certainty when they move to another position within that sector. Nurses, for example, now have greater certainty around their conditions of work no matter which District Health Board they work for.

Labour will amend the Employment Relations Act to provide greater statutory support for multi-employer collective bargaining.

Labour will ensure that only union members can obtain the benefits of union-negotiated agreements.

The Minimum Wage

Labour will guarantee annual adjustments to the minimum wage during the next term of government, so that the minimum wage at least keeps pace with increases in the average wage or the consumer price index, whichever is the greater.

Low Paid Work

Changes this decade have assisted low paid workers to feel more recognised, supported and valued for the work that they do.

Labour will review low-paid sectors of the economy and examine whether additional changes to legislation are necessary to improve access to collective bargaining and collective agreements, and achieve improved wages and conditions for workers in these sectors.

Workers in Precarious Employment

Labour believes that all workers should be assured of fundamental rights and conditions no matter whether they are involved in casual employment or in situations where their employer hires their skills out on contract to another employer.

Labour will ensure that workers employed in precarious forms of employment (such as labour hire, casual employment and contracting) are given similar rights to those in more traditional forms of employment.