

# THE ACTIVIST



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## ONTRACK LOST AGAIN?

On 30<sup>th</sup> July a working party met in Wellington to discuss how EWR wagons could safely be put back on the network. The wagons had been parked up by a Union ban since the tragic death of Sean Smith on 19<sup>th</sup> June.

Whilst noting that the investigations are continuing by OSH, Police, TAIC and the employer, one of the possible causes for Sean being killed at work has been identified as the lack of continuous communication between the workers whilst operating the cranes on the EWR wagons. The RMTU insists that Ontrack address this problem by providing an acceptable form of electronic communication between the workers involved in this work, so in any future emergency those on the wagons could be warned to evacuate the site immediately.

Now a month after the working party met there is still no word from Ontrack on progress in sourcing appropriate radio equipment. A cynic would suggest that the working party was only formed to get the Union to lift the ban and to get the wagons back to work.

Unless there is an appropriate response in the very near future the EWR's may well be parked up again. This time until there is an outcome.



## WHO YA GONNA CALL? – TAIC!

The Transport Accident Investigation Commission (TAIC) is investigating an accident where an RMTU

track worker member was fatally injured during rail recovery unit activities associated with a work train in double line signalling territory between Huntly and Te Kauwhata.

As part of the investigation the Commission is seeking information from any staff who have worked in double line signalling territory, or knows of someone who has worked in double line signalling territory, and have experienced a close call or "near hit" situation when working with a work train on one main line while rail traffic has been using the adjacent main line. Such experiences may have involved rail recovery, track laying or any other maintenance activity.

The Commissions inquiry is seeking to establish the causes and circumstances surrounding this tragic event with a view to preventing similar events in future. The Commission does not seek to apportion blame and does not become involved in judicial

proceedings.

Any information will be received in confidence and is protected from disclosure by the Transport Accident Investigation Commission Act.

Any person who wishes to report their experiences, or the experiences of others, can do so by email ([inquiries@taic.org.nz](mailto:inquiries@taic.org.nz)), in writing (PO Box 10323 The Terrace Wellington) or by phone (0800 188926) to any of the rail accident investigators; Dennis Bevin, Peter Miskell or Vernon Hoey.



## INEXPENSIVE DENTAL SERVICES FOR WGTN TRADE UNION MEMBERS

The Wellington Peoples Centre [situated in the old Federation of Labour building - Lukes Lane, off Manners Street - now known as

Compassion House] offers inexpensive (1/3 – 1/2 of the cost elsewhere) dental services e.g. \$35 for a check up for anyone.

Any patient of the medical services of the South East & City Primary Health Organisation – SECPHO - can access the People's Centre dental service (that is, patients of Newtown, Te Aro or Pacific Health Services, or Evolve) but you will need a referral from the service.

Better yet, if you join the Peoples Centre (\$10 every four weeks to be eligible to use the health services) you can get a *further* 10-15% discount on dental services as well as access to low cost primary care – doctor and nurse – and massage, counselling, acupuncture and footcare.

A leaflet giving further details is available from the Hutt Shops, Cityline Hutt and Wgtn Stagecoach delegates.



## ANNUAL CONFERENCE 07

Branches are reminded that the annual delegates' conference (AC) is being held at the Porirua Police College 30, 31 October and 1 November 2008. AC is the governing body of the Union and is the forum where we debate what we have achieved during the year and set the direction and priorities for the Union for the following 12 months. For example;

- It's where membership fees are set and where remits are debated and are won and lost on the force of logic of speakers.
- The Unions rail sector ratification process for collective agreements within the rail sector is a hardy annual for debate as another example.

Branches need to elect their conference delegate at the forthcoming AGM's (see Union rule 23). It is essential that National Office is advised ASAP of the name(s) and details of conference delegate(s) so that we can obtain early travel bookings to get the cheapest fares.

**NOTE:** Should arrangements need to change after the initial bookings are made then any cost of travel alteration (including name change of delegate) will be at the branches expense (a debit on your branch account).

See Union Policy rule 111 for (sub) branch allocations for delegates to conference. National Office pays all costs for one delegate from a branch and any additional observers are funded entirely by the branch (a debit on your branch account).

Various distinguished speakers including international guests will be speaking at conference. **We have just been advised of the Deputy Prime Minister's, the Hon Dr Michael Cullen, acceptance to be the opening speaker.**

See you there!

## NKR'S TOO HEAVY!

A Christchurch based signals team who were enroute to Wellington to do some work were stopped by Police after leaving Christchurch. Police wanted to weigh the NKR hi-rail vehicle. The back axle was just under weight but the front axle was way over. The NKR was also fitted with a new Hiab crane in addition to the hi-rail gear. Police made the guys off load all of the gear on the truck before allowing them to proceed to the ferry and another vehicle was despatched from CHCH to pick up the gear off loaded.

The fitness for purpose of the NKR's has been under question for some time. They are too small for the amount of equipment fitted and needing to be moved by gangs from time to time. 2 vehicles are now doing the trip to Wellington whereas one should have been enough. ONTRACK is doing its bit for environmental sustainability in line with Government expectations – NOT!

In response to the issue being raised by the RMTU, Peter Morton, Ontrack plant and equipment manager responded with a commitment that Ontrack would accept responsibility for the ticket, and gave an



assurance that the NKR would be replaced early next year.

The lesson is clear for RMTU members employed by Ontrack, don't take any chances with Ontrack vehicles, stick to the rules.

## WAGE INCREASES - LCI AND QES

Latest wage increase figures came out today. The Labour Cost Index shows that ordinary time wages rose in the June 2007 year by 3.1% (3.1% in the private sector and 2.9% in the public sector). However if we look at only those that received an increase, then the median increase for the year was 4.1% (4.2% in the private sector and 4.0% in the public sector). The average increase was 5.4% (5.4% in the private sector and 5.1% in the public sector). For the latest quarter, the median increases were 4.0% (4.0% in the private sector and 3.5% in the public sector) with average increases of 4.8% (4.9% in the private sector and 3.9% in the public sector). The unadjusted increase in LCI wages (not an official measure) was 4.6% for the last year.

The Quarterly Employment Survey measure of wages (which has some compositional problems) showed that average ordinary earnings in the quarter had fallen by 1% in the public sector and increased by 1% in the private sector. For the year, average wages rose by 4.6% in the public sector and 4.2% in the private sector.

As John Edward's of HSBC said in a piece today titled *New Zealand's modest wage increases* "New Zealand has some interesting economic policies challenges, but accelerating wages growth is clearly not one of them".

## RESTORE OSH & FUND IT

The most hard-hitting report on the state of H&S in years, from the National Occupational Health Safety Advisory Council, has identified an inflation adjusted 25% drop in government H&S funding since 1989 and damns the restructuring, in which

the Department of Labour's former OSH service has lost its distinct identity. The result, say the authors, is that the department's H&S service is now so diminished in leadership, staffing and technical expertise that it is unlikely to be able to implement the Government's own Workplace Health and Safety Strategy (WHSS). Briefly summarised, the report's key recommendations, are:

- reverse the decline in qualified health and safety staff;
- restore the former technical capacity now largely lost;
- align their health and safety efforts in government agencies;
- make inter-agency performance expectations explicit;
- ensure interventions are effective and based on evidence;
- fully align the ACC audit with the HSE Act;
- set minimum standards for private sector consultants;
- implement the earlier NOHSAC report on injury/ disease collection;
- ditto with surveillance of occupational exposures;
- provide advice and technical assistance which meets the needs of SMEs;
- ensure all government departments and Crown entities meet tertiary level in an ACC program.

The report, *National Profile of Occupational Health and Safety* in New Zealand is available for download at [www.nohsac.govt.nz](http://www.nohsac.govt.nz)

## BILLION DOLLAR BANK NOT PREPARED TO GIVE PAY INCREASE TO ALL STAFF

ANZ National Bank staff across the country is undertaking a day of action today following their rejection last week of the bank's offer



in employment negotiations. Bank staff are wearing 'fairness for all' stickers and undertaking other activities to highlight the inadequacy of the bank's offer.

A key reason that staff rejected the offer is that the bank is not prepared to offer the pay increase to all staff.

"ANZ National bank made over one billion dollars from New Zealand last year. The least it can give back is a fair pay increase to its entire hard working staff," said Andrew Campbell, Finsec Campaigns Director.

"Most of the staff excluded from the bank's pay offer is some of its longest serving and most loyal workers.

This offer demonstrates a lack of appreciation for their commitment to the bank and the continuity of service they have provided to the bank's customers and communities," said Campbell.

"This situation is easily fixed. ANZ National needs to listen to its staff, come back to the negotiating table next week and make a fair offer to all its staff," said Campbell.



## HELP US TO FIND THESE LOCO ENGINEER'S PLEASE!!!!!!

The following ex members left the Loco Engineers Trust fund and they are entitled to a refund of contributions. Anyone knowing the current contact details for any of the persons listed below please contact them and urge them to contact Julia @ RMTU National Office on 04 499 2066.

- Francis Keith, Amy, 13/03/82
- Jack Barry, Ellis, 02/01/82
- Donald Stewart, Fraser, 27/03/82
- Frederick B V, Groves, 05/07/85
- Leslie Arthur, Koschel, 14/04/79
- James Allister, MacLean, 06/04/84

- Patrick John, Page, 03/03/87
- Geneva Morgan, Pongia, 10/03/84
- Les John, Rabone, 16/12/84
- Michael T M, Ryan, 15/06/85
- Grant Gordon, Wild, 21/09/85

## RECORD LOW UNEMPLOYMENT – TIME TO MOVE ON WAGES

"With the labour market this tight, wages should be much higher than they are at present," CTU secretary Carol Beaumont said today.

Statistics New Zealand's quarterly Household Labour Force Participation survey out this morning showed the highest number of people in work and the lowest unemployment since the survey began.

"This is a considerable achievement, and confirms that the Government's active labour market approach is working. But it does mean employers need to bite the bullet on wages."

"If we are to make any headway in closing the 30% wage gap with Australia we need more widespread collective bargaining on an industry basis, and continued efforts in skill development, lifting productivity and improving the quality of work."

"The ethnic disparities in unemployment figures remain and we must not lose sight of this. We are pleased to see the figures heading in the right direction, but 7.0 percent of Maori and 7.8 percent of Pacific people are still out of work"

"There are also sectors where serious issues remain with the security of jobs, in particular manufacturing, and the Manufacturing Advisory Group announced on Tuesday will help give the sector the urgent attention it needs."

"With persistent skills and labour shortages, attention must turn to ways we can better organise work, and the bill before Parliament



to give workers a legislative right to request flexible working hours is one of a number of possible improvements in this area."



## NEW HIGH SPEED TRAINS

Alstom won a €2.1 billion order to supply 80 double decker very high-speed trains to SNCF (French National Railways). The contract has a conditional option for another 40 train sets, after the first deliveries scheduled for 2009. The new 320 km/h trains will be fitted with signalling and traction equipment, compatible with rail networks in France, Germany, Switzerland, and Luxembourg.



## THAILAND RAIL PRIVATISATION

The State Railway of Thailand (SRT) announced its plans to outsource its assets, rail-route operations and logistics management, in an effort to control the SRT's accumulated debt of Bt46.19 billion (US\$1.55 billion). Infrastructure projects account for Bt13.41 billion (US\$450 million) of debt, with a further Bt31.67 billion (US\$1.06 billion) from pension payments to employees. SRT's chief financial officer, Mr Arak Ratboriharn, was quoted by The Nation news service as saying the three new subsidiaries would operate in accordance with Thai public-private partnership legislation.



## LYTTELTON PAY SETTLEMENT

Logistics Officers at the Port of Lyttelton, who are members of the RMTU, will receive a 3.5 per cent pay rise this week under their renewed Collective Agreement.

The agreement, covering 10 logistics officers who plan the loading of ships and control container movements, expired on 30th June. It was not settled until the Lyttelton Port Company had been served

with 14 days' notice of strike action, under which the group would have refused to cover the night shift. A mediator got involved, and the deal was finalised just four days before the action was to begin.

The agreement covers a two-year term, with a pay rise of 3.5 per cent for each year. A lump sum was agreed, equivalent to back pay.

An important part of the settlement was agreement for an extra reliever on busy days. The logistics officers wanted recognition of the fact that their job had become busier and more complex, with increasing container throughput, an extra crane, twin-lifts, more straddles in the yard and an error-prone computer system. Also agreed was a more systematic approach to training and a tutor's allowance.

## TWO SIDES TO HOUSING AFFORDABILITY COIN

"Home affordability is not just about house prices – it is also about incomes, and low wages means home ownership is now increasingly out of reach for low and middle income New Zealanders," CTU president Ross Wilson told a select committee today.

The Council of Trade Unions presented to the Commerce select committee on their inquiry into housing affordability in New Zealand.

"House prices are still outstripping wages by 4 to 1. In the year to June for example, wages rose by 3.1% while house prices were up 12.2%. The significant gap between wages and house prices is worrying for many workers, in particular those trying to enter the home market for the first time."

"But regular wage increases are also vital in tackling the high cost of home ownership."

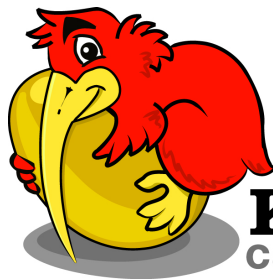
"It will be important to ensure workers make use of the KiwiSaver provisions for first home buyers, and unions are currently running a campaign to make sure union

members get the best opportunities to benefit from KiwiSaver."

The CTU submission also focused on improving the supply of affordable housing through subsidised home lending programmes, freeing up land banked property, shared equity, more state housing, affordable housing quotas, and higher investment in skilled labour for residential construction. It is available for download [here:](http://union.org.nz/policy/housing-affordability-June-07)  
<http://union.org.nz/policy/housing-affordability-June-07>

## WAGE DISCRIMINATION BILL REACHES NEXT STAGE

There will be one last chance for Parliament to amend Green Party MP Sue Bradford's private member's bill, originally aimed at abolishing wage discrimination for 16 and 17-year-old workers, when it undergoes its committee stages debate in the House this afternoon.



**union**  
**KIWISAVER**  
campaign

"I am pleased by news last night that the Government and New Zealand First are willing to support a further amendment which will strengthen the bill as reported back by the Select Committee," Ms Bradford says.

The latest amendment changes the Minimum Wage (Abolition of Age Discrimination) Amendment Bill so that young workers will become eligible for full adult rates of pay after either their first 200 hours in paid employment once they turn 16, or after their first three months on the job, whichever is the sooner.

This is a significant improvement, as for some young people it would have taken six or even nine months to clock up the 200 hours to become eligible to move to the full adult wage.

"I am further heartened by news last night of the deal which has been struck between

the NDU and Progressive Enterprises which will, among other things, mean that young workers under 18 – including 15-year-olds – will move to the full adult wage rate after either 200 hours or three months on the job.

"I congratulate both the union and employer on reaching this agreement and hope other retail employers will follow their lead in doing even better than the compromise bill I will be shepherding through the House later today.

"While I remain disappointed that I was not able to convince a majority of MPs to eliminate minimum wage discrimination for 16 and 17 year olds, I am pleased with the progress that has been made both inside Parliament and through industrial negotiation," Ms Bradford says.

## TOLL RAIL SELECTION OF TOWER AS KIWISAVER PROVIDER.

The RMTU has received some feedback concerning a communication from

Toll Rail regarding its selection of Tower as its preferred provider for Kiwi saver.

The communication dated 8<sup>th</sup> June 2007 outlined that Tower had been chosen, and implied that the RMTU had some influence in selecting Tower from the six government approved default providers who were interviewed as potential providers to Toll Rail.

In fact Toll Rail interviewed the six default providers and short listed two of them, Tower and ING. The RMTU was invited to hear presentations from these two. RMTU Industrial Officer Scott Wilson attended this presentation, of the two short listed companies there was nothing between them in terms of financial performance. What tipped the balance in favor of Tower, in our opinion, was the quality of its rollout plan and support for educating Toll staff (and RMTU members) on the benefits of Kiwi saver.

The meeting was attended by Toll management, an independent financial adviser employed by Toll, and RMTU's Scott Wilson, all parties agreed that bearing in mind all things were more or less equal between the prospective providers, Tower had the edge due to its roll out plan.

No decision was made at the meeting, Toll made its "preferred supplier decision" subsequent to the meeting attended by the RMTU.

### **MAORI MODELS OF ORGANISING**

The CTU is running an EREL approved course in Maori Models of Organising at a Christchurch Hui on 26 Sept 07. Any Chch based Maori member interested in attending the Hui should contact Julia at National office on 04 4992066 to commence arrangements.

### **Bits & Bobs –**

- Recently the Capital Connection (Wgtn – Palmerston North commuter train) was seen to stop half way down Platform 9 shortly after moving off from Wellington station. After a bit of a delay one rear door was observed to open and a very sheepish and embarrassed General Secretary was seen to disembark and walk down the platform to catch his usual Hutt Valley train home. It is reported that he stoically ignored the many gibes launched in his direction by caring Union members.
- The General Secretary will be on leave from 1 September to 8 September. Todd Valster will be acting General Secretary during this time.

**Let's be safe and look after one another!**

**Remember – Unity will ensure success!**

