

THE ACTIVIST



Published Regularly - ISSN 1178-7392 (Print & Online)

24 July 2009

GOVT HAS GOT IT WRONG

This Government is sending out the wrong message in this country. It is imposing widespread layoffs on the public sector, talking up wage freezes and generally spreading doom and gloom which is significantly impacting on consumer and household confidence. As a result we are all tightening our belts, not spending and staying home. This is causing consequential further layoffs in transport, retail, hospitality and other industries. This government is out of kilter with what our trading partners are doing and miles from Australia in more ways than geography.

Accordingly New Zealand is taking longer to come out of the recession than other OECD countries. This Government is more worried about ratings agencies than it is about working New Zealanders.

ONTRACK – NZRC

The RMTU and employer negotiation teams for the renewal of the MECA met in Wellington yesterday. A provisional settlement has been agreed subject to member ratification. A joint newsletter will be issued soon, followed by a round of member ratification meetings where details of the provisional settlement will be given. A postal ratification ballot will be conducted seeking authority for the Union to sign off the agreement. The renewed MECA will run for a period of 12 months once ratified.

It is current RMTU policy to seek a single MECA in 2010 for all of KiwiRail and so a 12 month deal aligns the dates.

LATEST CPI

Statistics New Zealand has released the quarterly Consumer Price Index for the period ended in the June 2009 quarter. It

shows that consumer prices rose 1.9 percent in the year to the June quarter. This is the lowest annual increase since the year to the September 2007 quarter, but is slightly higher than expected (the Reserve Bank had forecast 1.7 percent for example). It is a significant fall from 3.0 percent for the year ended March 2009. The index rose 0.6 percent in the three months to June.

Of the annual rise, the most significant upward group contributions came from

- Food prices rose 7.5 percent, continuing their much faster rise than the overall index, though their rise is slowing. Food prices accounted for over two-thirds of the increase in the CPI over the year. All five of the food subgroups increased in price: Fruit and vegetables up 8.3 percent, Meat, poultry and fish up 11.3 percent, Grocery food and Non-alcoholic beverages both up 7.0 percent, and Restaurant meals and ready-to-eat food up 4.8 percent.
- Housing and household utility prices rose 2.8 percent, although this is the lowest annual increase since the year to March 2002. Actual rentals for housing were up 1.7 percent.

FOOD PRICE INDEX

Statistics New Zealand also released the monthly Food Price Index for June 2009. For the June 2009 compared to May 2009, Food prices rose 2.8 percent. Fruit and vegetable prices rose 15.0 percent, Grocery food prices rose 1.1 percent, Meat, poultry and fish prices rose 2.1 percent, Non-alcoholic beverage prices rose 0.3 percent, Restaurant meals and ready-to-eat food prices rose 0.1 percent.

This is for the information and guidance of RMTU members only!

For the year from the months June 2008 to June 2009, Food prices increased 8.4 percent.

TE KUPENGA MAHI, ANNUAL HUI

We give advanced notice that the proposed dates for our Te Kupenga Mahi, annual hui are: 16 – 18 October 2009. The organisers are holding a booking for: Tapu Te Ranga Marae, Island Bay, Wellington, which is the proposed venue for the hui.

The hui will be celebrating 20 years of Te Kupenga Mahi. If you have been part of TKM's journey, thus far, or you wish to be part of TKM going forward, book these dates into your diary, and join the celebration. Equally, if you know anyone who has been part of TKM in the past, please pass the message on to them, we would love to see them at this hui.

Confirmed details will be emailed to you and posted in the newsletters in the near future. For now lock in the dates and plan to be a part of it. If you have any questions, please contact Sam Kahui via any of the contact details below. Sam Kahui, Telecommunications Technician | ONTRACK Infrastructure Ltd NZ, email sam.kahui@ontrack.govt.nz, Fax 04 498 3007 | DDI 04 498 3109 | Mobile 021 242 6055

NSW COURTS CRACK DOWN ON OVERLOADING OFFENCES

Two recent landmark court cases in New South Wales have found companies responsible for severe breaches in the overloading of trucks. Bartter Enterprises, better known as Steggles, has been convicted of inducing or rewarding breaches of road transport law after it negligently accepted substantially and severely overloaded trucks on 31 occasions. The company was fined more than \$50,000 in fines and costs.

It was the first successful prosecution under the Chain of Responsibility laws of a company consigning goods. In a separate case, a company director, from the now defunct Victorian business Bullin Pty Ltd has been banned from moving freight on any NSW road. It is the first time any NSW

court has issued a Prohibition Order under road transport law.

The court found the director was a 'systematic or persistent offender', and banned him from engaging in any business that involves moving a heavy vehicle to, through or from a NSW road. He was also ordered to pay more than \$160,000 in fines and costs personally in relation to his former company's offences.

NSW Minister for Roads, Michael Daley, said the prosecutions send a strong message to those in trucking industry who flout overloading laws. "These judgements should make every trucking company and freight forwarder that sends or orders goods in Australia sit up and take notice," Mr Daley said. "This is great news for operators who do the right thing, and want a professional industry that competes on a level playing field."

NO TO BIGGER TRUCKS

The Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) says that plans to allow larger trucks on the road will have bad consequences.

Rail and Maritime Transport Union General Secretary Wayne Butson says if larger trucks are permitted, it will make New Zealand roads less safe and will be bad for the environment.

He says rail and coastal shipping are better methods of moving heavy goods.

Public submissions close this week on the Government proposals to allow bigger trucks on the road and Mr Butson says New Zealanders should make their voice heard.

"We urge New Zealanders to make a submission opposing the plan for bigger heavier trucks as it will be the public who will be following them going more slowly up the steep hills and having to take greater risks to get past logging trucks that are 2 metres longer."

The proposed rule changes within the discussion document will allow large trucks "with a gross mass of up to and including 53 tonnes or more which is a 20% increase on current maximum tonnages" on to the roads, subject to a permit being issued by the New Zealand Transport Agency. Logging trucks will also be 2 metres longer.

Mr Butson says the internationally accepted formula is that if you double the size of the truck, you will do sixteen times the damage to the road. In moving from 44 to 53 tonnes, twice as much damage will result for each truck movement.

He says it is unreasonable of the trucking industry to expect other road users to carry the additional road damage cost.

"The RMTU is concerned at moves to replace road user charges with a flat diesel tax, which would exacerbate the already unlevel playing field between road and rail/coastal shipping and would be another subsidy from the taxpayer to the trucking industry."

The Minister of "Road" Transport Steven Joyce has claimed that the change would result in fewer trucks on the road which is a ridiculous statement unless the trucking industry is about to make hundreds of truck drivers redundant, says Mr Butson.

The Union has also criticized how information used to justify the truck plan had been "buried."

When launching the proposed changes, Minister Joyce said that New Zealand would receive productivity gains of \$250-\$500 million if the rule changes were implemented.

However, attempts to obtain the report containing the figures have been blocked by officials, as it "contains commercially sensitive information gained from the freight/trucking companies who took part."

Mr Butson says it is unacceptable the evidence used to justify the proposals is unobtainable by New Zealand citizens.

He says the environmental and emissions impact of allowing bigger trucks on the road is a serious concern, alongside many other negative factors.

"The poor safety record of the trucking industry, the impacts of excessive truck traffic on roadside communities and motorists, and the essentially unregulated nature of road transport operations, all justify more, not less, restriction of the road transport industry."

HEAVIER TRUCK PROPOSAL SLAMMED

The Maritime Union has taken a swipe at a proposal to allow heavier trucks on the roads as submissions on the issue draw to a close.

The Land Transport Rule -- Vehicle Dimensions and Mass Amendment could be signed off by the end of 2009 with application for permits starting in 2010.

The amendment would create a permit system allowing some trucks to carry up to 50 tonnes on specified routes. The statutory limit is currently 44.

Submissions on the issue close this week, with division over whether productivity gains from allowing trucks to carry greater loads outweighs environmental and safety effects.

Maritime Union general secretary Trevor Hanson said heavier trucks would lead to greater danger on the roads and more damage to them.

Rising fuel costs and environmental pressures such as greenhouse emissions also meant the move was a negative one.

Mr Hanson said promotion of coastal shipping and rail was needed to move the transport industry forward.

But a trial with heavier loads run from last year showed productivity increased between 10 and 20 percent, trip numbers reduced by 16 percent and fuel use dropped 20 percent.

Transport Minister Stephen Joyce last month said emissions, noise and vibration effects of heavier vehicles were also tested and results showed no measurable increase in any of them.

Mr Joyce maintained the move would reduce freight costs and help exporters and New Zealand "grow faster out of the current global recession". It would also lead to fewer trucks being on the road.

The proposal has also been opposed by the Green Party, with MP Sue Kedgley saying heavier trucks would present major hazards to other motorists, and that many of New Zealand's roads were not suitable for very heavy vehicles.

WHAT HAS TASMANIA AND NEW ZEALAND GOT IN COMMON? RECENT RAIL HISTORY ACTUALLY.....

Rail operations in Tasmania will soon be firmly back in the hands of the State Government. The State's exclusively freight rail operation was originally handed over to the Commonwealth in the mid-1970s as part of the creation of Australian National (AN). With the privatisation of AN in 1997 it was sold to Ed Burkhardt's Australian Transport Network, also heavily involved in New Zealand's Tranz Rail at the time. Six years later and almost by default, Tasmania's rail operations became part of Pacific National (PN) when then parent Toll Holdings took over Tranz Rail in 2003. The PN era did not get off to a good start and it wasn't long before the State was forced into buying back the track for the nominal sum of \$1 or face the prospect of PN withdrawing services (Sound familiar???? Happened here in 2004 except Cullen paid 2 dollars as he had no 1 dollar coin). This was followed by a \$78 million funding commitment from the Commonwealth for track upgrading. It was still not enough for PN and a decision was made to sell off the above rail operations during 2008. Unfortunately this process failed to produce a suitable buyer. In June this year with major service withdrawals once again looming, the Tasmanian Government finally had no option but to agree to pay out \$32 million for PN's remaining operations, placing both above and below rail under its control. The Commonwealth has also weighed in with a hefty \$195 million contribution to upgrade a significant part of the network to make up for, in the words of Tasmanian Infrastructure Minister, Graeme Sturges "...the result of years of neglect and underinvestment by previous owners."

NATIONAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (NMC) BALLOT

Ballot papers have been issued out of National Office and MUST be returned by 31 July 2009. The official count will be done on Monday 3 August 2009. Please ensure that you vote as instructed on the ballot paper

to ensure that your vote counts and above all – **ENSURE YOU VOTE!**

LOCOMOTIVE EVENT RECORDER DOWNLOADS

The procedures that relate to Voice and Event Recorders are incorporated in the Rail Operating Manuals, Section 6 in the Passenger Rail Operating Manual and Section 7 in the (Freight) Rail Operating Manual.

Random extractions have been in place for a number of years and our understanding is that any breach that is detected during a random extraction is to be treated on an educative basis and then if the behavior continues, like speeding, then further disciplinary action is likely to be taken.

Random extractions are not targeted extractions whereby targeted extractions are undertaken because an operator has had an incident or is under review due to already coming under notice, similar to a driver being placed on the "at risk" register for safety observations following an operating incident e.g. SPAD or speeding OR a new driver being observed for the defined period following initial certification.

Random extractions do not need a union witness, targeted or post incident extractions do need a union witness.

Random event recorder extractions are one way of the company complying with Health and Safety in Employment Act by identifying and managing hazards in the workplace to prevent harm to other employees and the travelling public.

The union has and will continue to push for all motive power units to have functional event recorders – event recorders have saved more Drivers that they have sacked.

RAIL SAFETY AWARENESS WEEK

The annual Rail Safety Awareness Week is 26-31 July 2009. The main focus of the week is to remind and raise awareness amongst the public of the dangers of level crossings and trespassing on the rail corridor. TV ads will run through the week. Chris Cairns will be in NZ for that week and will do media events to assist the campaign.



Let's all commit to spread the word and to do our bit to make rail safer for us and for the public.

CONFERENCE 2009 REMITS

A reminder that Remits for conference close on 31 July 2009 but late remits are frequently accepted and conference delegates also have an opportunity to table "notices of motion" at conference to be debated on the floor as well.

It is essential that early advice is given and received for remits which seek to achieve major change within the Union or the way it conducts itself as the delegates need to be able to obtain a mandate on how to vote at conference.

All remits to conference MUST have been passed by a majority vote at a duly constituted Union branch meeting.

LOCO FUND INVITES NEW MEMBERS

The Chairman and Trustees continue to invite enquiries and applications from prospective members to apply for membership of The New Zealand Locomotive Engineers' Sickness, Accident & Death Benefit Fund, 'the Fund'.

Benefits payable include a range of Loss of Certificate Medical Retirement benefits payable based on age of joining and age at date of loss, as well as a Death Benefit.

Applicants must:

- Hold a Locomotive Engineers Certificate,
- Be a full time Employee of KiwiRail Ltd, United Transport Ltd (previously Alstom Transport NZ Ltd), or Veolia Transport (previously Connex Auckland Limited), and Taieri Gorge Railway Ltd, and
- Have completed medical examination within four (4) months of application.

There are no changes for Existing Fund Members who will continue with their current arrangements and receive benefits as detailed in the First Schedule of the Trust Deed.

For further information and an application form contact the Secretary Julia Harrison

on (04) 499-2066 or email jharrison@rmtunion.org.nz

LOSS OF HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE A BLOW TO NZ WORKERS

Research on the health and safety of New Zealand's workforce has taken a huge blow with the disestablishment of the National Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee (NOHSAC). The committee will publish its final reports today.

CTU President Helen Kelly said: "The Committee was disestablished on the 30th of June with no Government announcement providing reasons or who was responsible for the decision."

NOHSAC was established in 2003 to provide independent advice directly to the Minister of Labour on major occupational health and safety issues in New Zealand.

"The Committee's independence was crucial so that research into the health and safety of workers was protected from economic or political conflicts of interest," added Kelly.

The Committee advised the Minister on measures that would deliver the greatest benefit for the prevention of occupational injury and disease, and developed an evidence-based approach to occupational health and safety issues.

NOHSAC academics and professional researchers produced comprehensive reports to inform important policy issues affecting all workers. Research included the burden of occupational disease and injury, the economic and social costs and surveillance of occupational disease and injury, surveillance and control of workplace exposures, and a national profile of occupational health and safety in New Zealand.

NOHSAC will be releasing four final reports today. These reports are:

- The Evolving Work Environment in New Zealand: Implications for Occupational Health and Safety
- Work Relatedness of Occupational Disease and Injury: Implications for diagnosis, rehabilitation and compensation

- Occupational Health and Safety in Small Business
- Women's Occupational Health and Safety in New Zealand.

ALARMING NEWS

Subway train drivers in Tokyo are woken every day in their depot dormitory by a pillow that automatically inflates at the appointed time.

NEW LASHING RULES SET TO BE UNVEILED

LLOYD'S Register is preparing to introduce new provisional rules on ergonomic container lashing aimed at protecting stevedores and ships' crews from the hazards of securing containers on deck.

The rules, to be introduced this autumn, have been drawn up in direct response to the fact that there are too many accidents suffered by stevedores involved in container lashing operations, said Lloyd's Register containerhips manager David Tozer.

If lashing arrangements, including access to containers, were not considered during the design, construction and maintenance of ships, container working could be particularly hazardous, said Mr Tozer, with the risk of falls from height, slips, trips and falls, and minor injuries.

Stevedores were classed as "industrial athletes" by ergonomic experts and could suffer from musculoskeletal disorders, he said. Precise control of long, heavy lashing bars and operating turnbuckles in cramped conditions with awkward reaching takes its toll. "When a ship arrives in port, the stevedores board the ship and are responsible for lashing the containers, but they have no control over the condition or design of the ship. As a result, people are being injured and even losing their lives.

"These hazards have become unacceptable to many container terminal operators, who may refuse to work hazardous vessels," Mr Tozer added.

LR has been involved in an International Maritime Organization initiative to tackle the problem of stevedore safety, which has

been subject to some delays. LR's rules stipulate requirements for working areas, container stowage and securing arrangements, fall protection, walkways and transit areas, ladders, steps, coamings and hatchways, signs and indications, container securing fittings and lighting.

Mr Tozer said LR's own solution could be seen as a compromise but was also workable. "The design for new ships is important, but there is also a fleet of containerhips which, with a little bit of investment, could be made a lot safer for the stevedores retrospectively," he said.

"A lot can be done with a tin of paint — marking out tripping hazards, for example. Bridging platforms and effective fall protection can be installed. There are ways to make access much easier and safer and it does not have to be expensive."

SAVING IS HARD ON LOW INCOMES

Reducing debt and saving is hard for workers with reduced household incomes, says CTU Economist Bill Rosenberg. "While I agree in general with Reserve Bank Governor Alan Bollard that people should be reducing their debt levels and saving more, it is important to remember how difficult this will be for many workers at this time through no fault of their own," said Rosenberg.

"Households are being hit by increasing unemployment and reductions in paid work hours. Redundancies are forcing many of those affected to eat into their savings."

"We need a balanced approach which combines job security and continuing wage increases so that workers can both save and meet the needs of their households. It is important that people continue to spend at the present time in order to keep the economy moving."

The CTU was reacting to a speech yesterday by Dr Bollard in which he said that "household savings, investment in the tradable sector, and deeper funding markets are the key to New Zealand's economic recovery".

The CTU agrees with this approach, but workers need a greater degree of income

certainty and job security in order to contribute in this way.



ITF URGES INTERVENTION OVER CHARGES AGAINST UNION LEADERS IN THAILAND

The ITF has expressed serious concern regarding summonses against a number of leading trade unionists who participated in peaceful anti-government protests, including at the airport last year. The charges against the trade unionists, many of them representing ITF affiliates, relate to airport occupations and closures that took place at the end of 2008. They include invasion and destruction of property and inciting unrest as well as terrorism, which carries the death penalty. According to some reports, no physical damage was caused during the actions. Those from ITF-affiliated unions facing charges are: Somsak Kosaisook, former president and present adviser of the State Railway Workers' Union of Thailand; Sawit Kaewwarn, president of the State Railway Workers' Union of Thailand and Chamsri Sukchotirat, president of the Thai Airways International Union. Another trade unionist, Sirichai Mai-ngam, president of the Electricity Generating Authority State Enterprise Workers' Union, has also been summonsed.

In a letter to prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, ITF general secretary David Cockcroft described the charges as "grossly exaggerated" and stated: "The ITF fully supports the rights of its members to engage in legitimate and peaceful protest action and would strongly urge you to intervene to quash these shocking allegations and withdraw the charges made."

He added: "I am sure that you agree with me, prime minister Vejjajiva, not only that these charges are disproportionate in nature, but also that a priority of any government must be to foster positive industrial relations."

The ITF has called on affiliates to show solidarity with the trade unionists by writing letters of protest to Thai embassies

in their own country. The RMTU has responded with solidarity protest letters.

DON'T LET FITCH FRIGHTEN YOU, CTU TELLS GOVERNMENT

The Government should still be considering further stimulation of the economy to head off rising unemployment (forecast to hit 8 percent in 2010) despite the Fitch revision of its outlook for New Zealand's credit rating, said CTU Economist and Policy Director Bill Rosenberg.

"Fitch cites the large current account deficit, rising foreign indebtedness, the reliance on short-term foreign funding by banks, and low household savings along with the volatility of the New Zealand dollar," said Rosenberg. "But very little of those overseas liabilities are public debt. Fitch's calls for further cuts in public spending are therefore unjustified and should be resisted."

"We remind Fitch that almost 90 percent of the current account deficit is due to net investment income flowing out of New Zealand, which cost the country \$13.4 billion in the year to March. The great bulk of this is interest and dividends on private liabilities, and is not due to government debt, which is still at a low level. Two-thirds of the international debt is due to banks borrowing overseas."

Even at its forecast peak, net government debt will be a very small proportion of New Zealand's international liabilities, and small compared to other OECD countries.

Dividends and other income from foreign investment in New Zealand companies cost \$7.9 billion in the March year. "New Zealanders should not be hit by this legacy of large scale privatisation in the 1990s and lack of effective screening of overseas investment," said Rosenberg.

"Neither should public services and the need for the Government to take further action against unemployment be undermined by the big four banks racking up high levels of short term overseas debt."

CTU WELCOMES BANK INQUIRY

The Council of Trade Unions has welcomed the announcement of an inquiry into bank profits. "It is a constructive initiative. The CTU intends to contribute to this inquiry and we hope that all political parties will support it," said CTU Economist and Policy Director Bill Rosenberg.

"We were disappointed that the Select Committee inquiry did not proceed. We have already expressed our concern that interest rates are too high due to larger than justifiable margins among the big four Australian owned banks. These banks have been over reliant on foreign borrowing which has contributed to the current account deficit and the high and volatile exchange rate, all of which leaves the Reserve Bank's actions relatively impotent in good times and bad."

Rosenberg added that the inquiry could usefully look at not only whether bank margins and profits are too high, but also whether they are too reliant on overseas and short term borrowing, whether their lending is making sufficient contribution to stimulating the economy during this recession, and options for resolving these matters. There is also the issue of tax avoidance and how this may be affecting banks' contribution to the economy.

TOLL NETWORKS (TOLL TRANZ LINK)

In a letter to the RMTU Toll Networks (TN) CEO Greg Miller stated that for the last 12 months trading for the company has been difficult due to the corporate greed created global financial meltdown. TN has experienced significant work volume decline. To date revenue is 20% down. The company has conducted a review of its operation and proposes a restructure which will see up to 30 positions made redundant nationwide with not all branches being affected. He said that the company had held off as long as it could on shedding staff.

The procedure for redundancy is clearly stated within the Collective agreement and all branches and delegates have a copy of the CA sent to them. Please contact your

regional organiser for any assistance during this depressing time. As usual the greedies cause the chaos but it is workers who pay the price.



HEBEI SPIRIT CAPTAIN EXPRESSES THANKS

Captain Jasprit Singh Chawla, one of the two seafarers released in June following 18 months of detention in South Korea, has conveyed his thanks to all who supported him. He and chief officer Syam Chetan were detained after their vessel, the Hebei Spirit, was hit by a crane barge, causing an oil spill.

In an email addressed to the ITF on 15 July, Chawla says: "Thanks to you, I am finally back home with my loved ones. I feel Samsung tried everything to prove us guilty and keep us back in Korea but the support and determination from you and the whole of the shipping community was so strong that it minimised their efforts.

"I don't think I would ever be able to thank each and every individual who came forward to support us. I am finding it difficult to find words to show my feelings as the word 'thanks' looks too insignificant to express my feelings.

"On coming back the support and love which I received from my fellow seafarers and others was very touching as they understood what all we went through. Many of them offered their full support to help us prove we were fully innocent.

"Please do convey my thanks to all other people with you on behalf of me and family for believing in me."

The ITF and a number of unions and shipping organisations led an international campaign for the release of the Hebei Two, as they had become known. The RMTU and MUNZ both undertook solidarity actions to support the release call.

BRASH APPOINTMENT SIGNALS TROUBLE FOR KIWI WORKERS - EPMU

The Government's decision to appoint Don Brash to chair the 2025 productivity taskforce signals trouble for workers, says

the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union. The union is concerned the appointment indicates the government expects outcomes from the group consistent with Dr Brash's widely known neo-liberal beliefs.

EPMU national secretary Andrew Little says such a hard right economic agenda would be bad news for New Zealand workers and any prospect of closing the wage gap with Australia. "While we will have to reserve our views until we see the final makeup of the taskforce, Brash's appointment is a very strong signal that the recommendations being sought by the National-Act Government are the same prescriptions we saw in the 1990s.

"Dr Brash is well known for his firm views on removing labour protections, privatising assets and slashing the public sector, all of which led to wage stagnation, high unemployment and rising social dysfunction throughout the 1990s.

"Brash's personal involvement in implementing many of the structural problems currently holding back New Zealand's economic performance may also limit his effectiveness in this role. As a long time champion of the Reserve Bank Act, for example, he is unlikely to advocate the long overdue reform of this legislation."

The EPMU is also concerned about Brash's top-down approach to improving productivity. "For productivity improvements to be sustainable and fair they can't be code for forcing people to work longer for less money, it has to be about worker engagement and investment in new technology and research and development.

"If productivity improvements are going to be sustainable they need to translate into real improvements in workers' living standards, not just higher profits for business. Unless workers have a stake in this process we're simply not going to lift our performance over the long term.

"Unfortunately the tired old ideological answers Dr Brash and his peers have been pushing for more than thirty years are unlikely to result in anything like the outcomes New Zealand's workers deserve."

ENGLISH CONFIRMS NATIONAL'S PRIVATISATION AGENDA

The Finance Minister has confirmed that moves towards greater efficiency in the public sector are a smokescreen for increasing privatisation in the public service, Labour's State Services spokesperson Grant Robertson said today.

"Despite John Key's election promise last year not to reorganise or restructure the public service, his Finance Minister is doing just that," Grant Robertson said. "The question though is why is he really doing it? Bill English says the recession calls for restraint, and we accept that the public service needs to be efficient and aware of every dollar spent.

"But the sweeping changes being signalled by the Government point towards a major shift in direction for the State Sector towards privatisation.

"Bill English confirmed as much this morning when he clearly stated there will be more private contracting of core public service functions.

"Is it a coincidence there are also reports of Meridian Energy being prepared for sale?" "Is it a coincidence the preacher of privatisation Don Brash is appointed to run the Government's productivity taskforce? "Is it a coincidence Rodney Hide, the minister who appointed the former National Party leader, professed his 'love' of privatisation at the weekend?

Grant Robertson says the Government has laid off 2000 public servants since the election despite its promise to cap, not cut the core public service.

"This morning Bill English said there are more job losses to come. The secret agenda is now no longer secret. National is taking the knife to the core public service and the country's teachers, nurses, and other frontline workers will feel the pain," Grant Robertson said. "The travesty here is that National isn't being up front about what it is doing. Contracting out core public services to companies who measure success by profit margins isn't in the best interests of Kiwis.

"New Zealanders don't support privatisation, and National didn't reveal its plans before the election." Grant Robertson said

Bits & Bobs

- United Group Limited and GE Transportation have signed a series of 10-year agreements for the sale and distribution of locomotives and associated technology and services in Australia. Through these agreements, UGL Rail will remain the Australian distributor of GE's US heavy-haul locomotives, including the Evolution Series. UGL Rail will also continue to provide spare parts, maintenance and servicing to GE locomotives and to design and build locomotives in Australia using GE technology.
- On June 12 the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) and the United Transportation Union (UTU) filed a joint petition for an emergency order with the Federal railroad Administration (FRA) seeking to prohibit the use of single person train crewing, whether they be remote control or conventional. The petition states "The evidence shows that no condition exists where a lone Loco Engineer or remote control operator are safe".
- The American FRA has sounded the alarm on rail safety. 2008 stats show 19 rail worker fatalities, by March of 2009 7 rail workers had been killed at work and this had increased to 12 before the end of May 2009.

Let's Be Safe Out There & remember these few key pointers.....

- Maintain situational awareness at all times;
- Ensure all are aware of the work to be performed;
- Make safety your first priority;

- Make sure you will go home safe and sound at the end of your shift;
- Make sure your workmate will go home safe and sound at the end of their shift;
- Do not allow yourself to be distracted.
- Do not make assumptions

"WE'RE STRONGER TOGETHER"!

