



Do Justice!!

“Do Justice, Love Kindness and Walk Humbly With Your God” Micah 6:8

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the May 2015 edition of Do Justice. This newsletter prepared by Auckland Diocesan Social Justice Group looks at various Social Justice Issues.

Zero Hour Contracts- A step too far.

Over the last 25 years we have seen the balance between Employers and Employees tip dramatically in favour of the Employer with only the introduction of compulsory Employment Contracts/Agreements and the Employment Court in the 1990s as a counterbalance. At the same time the more militant Trade Unions power was broken so we no longer have the destructive strikes of the 1980s.

The introduction of the **Minimum Wage** in the 1980s effectively replaced the Award system that had been in place for some 60 years and generally ensured that the wages of one adult was sufficient for a typical family to live on. Despite regular adjustments to the **Minimum Wage** the rate has steadily decreased in relationship to the wages required for a family to live at an acceptable standard. Today the gap between the **Minimum Wage** and the **Living Wage** - *The income necessary to provide workers and their families with the basic necessities of life. A living wage will enable workers to live with dignity and to participate as active citizens in society.* – has now reached \$5.00 per hour or \$200 per week for someone with 40 hours of paid work in the week.

Over recent years the specter of “part time work”, once a useful way for the care giver in the family to earn a bit once the children started school and for teenagers to get some income, is now being exploited by employers through the introduction of **Zero Hours Contracts**. Legislation requires that all employees sign an Employment Agreement before starting work. The agreement has to specify the place of work, the employee’s duties, and the weekly hours of work. Unfortunately the legislations does not require that a minimum number of hours be specified so employers under the catch cry of flexibility started some years ago not to specify any hours – hence the **Zero Hours Contract**. These contracts require the employee to be available for work at any time without any requirement for the Employer to specify when and for how long.

Effectively a person is “Employed” but possibly has no “Work”. This situation can lead to abuses that traditionally would have led to possible action in the Employment Court.

For example if the employers wants to get rid of an employee they do not have to give written notice and follow due process but can just stop roster hours for the employee. The employee is still “Employed” but receives no wages.

Zero Hours Contracts are widely used in the fast food industry and well as other industries with irregular hours such as care givers, security personnel etc. It was concerning to see a report after the Germanwings Airbus crash in the French Alps that some low cost airlines use Zero Hour Contracts for pilots.

Campbell Live started to raise public awareness of the Zero Hours issue earlier in the year so it was both good and appropriate that Campbell Live was able to announce on 7th April 2015 that Restaurant Brands, who run a number of Fast Food Chains in NZ, had agreed to do away with Zero Hour Contracts for all their staff and to specify at least a minimum number of hours in their Employment Agreements. This a good start and other fast food chains are under pressure to follow Restaurant Brands example. Michael Woodhouse, the Minister of Labour, is also making noises about introducing legislation which is encouraging but the devil as usual will be in the detail so do not hold your breath..

Furthermore the Government needs to dramatically increase enforcement of existing employment laws particularly the need for employment agreements before a new employee can start work and paying the minimum wage.

Zero Hour Contracts are a step too far.

Surveillance in the Work Place

Kim Hill on 11th April 2015 interviewed Esther Kaplan on Saturday Morning. Esther Kaplan is Editor of the Investigative Fund at the Nation Institute in the USA, and writer of the cover story in the March issue of Harper's magazine, *The Spy Who Fired Me*, about workplace monitoring.

Esther Kaplan talked about how large corporate organisations are increasingly using advance technology to monitor workers in the workplace. She mentioned UPS a major Courier and Parcel Delivery Service in the USA with thousands of delivery trucks and drivers. UPS fitted some 200 sensors in their trucks and in the driver’s handheld device for recording and accepting delivery. The Truck Driver is monitored very second of their working life. Drivers were

then interrogated if they took a few seconds too long to delivery or collect a parcel. She also mentioned computer software used by companies in the retail sector that can monitor the sales registers so that as soon as sales started to drop off sales assistances were told to go clock off and go to the lunch room to wait until sales increased again. All the time sales assistance spent in the lunch room is unpaid.

These were only two examples of Work Place Surveillance which may or may not be used in New Zealand but according to Esther Kaplan there are no laws or regulations covering such practices. We have been concerned in New Zealand about government agencies monitoring personal communications and the need for clear legal controls on such practices now it looks as if we should be seriously looking at invasive surveillance in the workplace. Where will this desire to monitor every part of our lives stop?

Where has all the money gone?

Trevor McGlinchey Executive Officer, New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) recently commented on Community Scoop that: *“Some government funded social services organisations report it’s been over ten years since they last received a cost of living allowance for the services they deliver. The increase in inflation over that period is over 27%¹. So during a time of huge demand for services, especially since the Global Financial Crisis, and increasing demands for accountability, achievement of outcomes, and payment of increased costs like KiwiSaver, social service organisations have effectively decreased their spending power by over a quarter. During this period as well there has been a dramatic increase of the complexity of the services required by whanau, families and communities.²*

We hear similar stories from International Development agencies working with the poor such as Christian World Service and TEARFUND that government support has decreased and become more complicated to get and report on. How does this fit with a Government that says it wants to work with community and social service organisations? Inflation is certainly not the challenge it was in the 1990s but 27% is still significant and can only mean that organisations that have had no increases must reduce service.

If the cost of living has increased 27% in the last 10 years then the tax take will have increased by at least that amount, and in the case of GST significantly more as a result of the increase to 15% in 2009. So what has happened to the money? A large portion went to fund the tax cuts for the rich in 2009. Then there has been \$30 million for Rio Tinto, \$26 million for a new flag, tax breaks for film makers such as Peter Jackson, and on it goes. But when it comes to fund essential social service agencies working with those in need there is not enough funds even to keep up with inflation.

Fault Lines: Human Rights in New Zealand.

The Law Foundation has recently issued a report by Judy McGregor, Sylvia Bell and Margaret Wilson. In introducing the report the authors state: *This three year research project*

evaluates whether New Zealand’s ratification of the six major international human rights treaties and engagement in the Universal Periodic Review process has increased the implementation of human rights in New Zealand. In other words what does the fact that New Zealand is a signatory to international human rights treaties and regularly reports to the United Nations on its progress in implementing them mean for ordinary New Zealanders? Has improved their situation?³

The report makes a number of recommendations that go to the heart of our freedoms in New Zealand. Worth a read..

State Housing

Further to the April comments in Do justice on State Housing a national network of state and private housing tenants and supporters formed to protest the Government’s plans to sell State Houses. The group is SHAN – State Housing Action Network. SHAN is in the process of organising meetings and protest marches and has prepared a petition to the Government which is attached. WE encourage people to sign this petition and send it back to SHAN. One of our basic human rights is the right to shelter, this appears to be eroded by the decision to sell State Houses. Incidentally why does a Government Agency set up to serve the people – Housing NZ – make a “profit” and pay a dividend?

Living Wage taken away by Auckland Council CEO earning close to \$700,000 a year.

On February 25 the Albert-Eden Local Board decided that a contract for the management of the Mt Albert Aquatic Centre would only be awarded if a living wage of \$19.25 an hour was introduced for the facility’s staff. But last week the board received a memo from Auckland Council CEO Stephen Town, scuppering the idea. On Wednesday at an extraordinary meeting, the board decided to push ahead with the living wage provision as long as the current costs of operating the pool did not increase. **Should staff overrule elected board members decisions?**

Up Coming Events.

Writers for Justice and Peace Workshop. 22 - 23 May
Napier Cathedral led by Rev Erice Fairbrother.

More information:

www.ohcnz.org.nz/Spirituality-Centre/Writers-for-Justice

The St Paul’s institute in London organises a number of seminars on important political topics that are video streamed over their website:⁴ The next event is:

The Ins and Outs of Policy Making. What role for the Church? 18th May 2015.

Following the recent English House of Bishop’s letter “Who is my neighbour? This seminar will reflect in when, how and why the Church engages in political debate and how to do it more effectively.

¹ (http://www.rbnz.govt.nz/monetary_policy/inflation_calculator/).

² <http://community.scoop.co.nz/>

³ http://www.lawfoundation.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2011_38_17-Public-version-of-Research-Report-embargoed-till-2.4.15.pdf

⁴ institute@stpaulscathedral.org.uk.

