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Families and the Ports of Auckland vs Maritime Union

Why are the ports of Auckland on strike ?

The Ports of Auckland management and Maritime Union have been negotiating over this matter for a while now and it all flared up just after the election last year.

The dispute stems from the fact that the Ports of Auckland management want to introduce flexible rosters that they say will increase competitiveness and productivity. The union says these changes will lead to a casualised workforce and lose a guaranteed hours of work for a permanent full time staff member. Port workers want to be valued for the work they do, have income security and to be treated fairly.

Being a casual worker means that you aren't guaranteed work or income. The Port's expectation is that workers would wait at home and wait to be called in. Other times, if the Ports of Auckland know in advance that they are going to be busy the casual workers will receive a txt 24 hours prior to the shift.

What is the impact on workers & their families?

Without a reliable regular income there is a lack of certainty. Many port workers have young families. Families will not only be uncertain what their income will be, but also how regular it will be. It may impact upon parents abilities to commit to support their children financially in normal school activities like sports.

The decision to take industrial action is not an easy one and reflects the seriousness of the proposed changes. If the Ports of Auckland have their way then many workers will seek employment overseas, away from their immediate or extended families and support structures.

What and who are supporting / advocating for the workers?

The New Zealand Firefighters unions marched down Tamaki drive to the picket line and then were greeted with a haka by the wharfies. The CTU, through President Helen Kelly, has also shown support. Twenty-eight Auckland Council local board members are throwing their support behind the striking workers. One of the local board members Michael Wood says, "nothing is going to get resolve while the Ports of Auckland management is taking such a hardline position and is threatening to contract out the works job.

What does this mean for their children returning to school?

This is putting a lot of pressure not only on the workers and their partners but their children's future as well. Preparing for school isn't a walk in the park as some of you will know. Paying for school fees is compulsory (even if it's a 'donation'), buying school uniforms and purchasing stationery for the new year is a major expenditure. This creates uncertainty for the wharfies children whether or not they will be going to school with lunch or not because it's the not knowing if mum or dad received a txt for a shift this week. Their future lies in the hands of Ports of Auckland Management.

How family orientated have the Ports of Auckland been ?

The Ports of Auckland management have always accommodated and created warm family and child friendly environment

throughout several events such as Round the bays, Christmas parties and many more. But with uncertainty in the workforce for the workers and their families it seems the company are not prepared to take the same approach and accommodate the same way they have been for many years. There is a hard line being adopted by the Ports of Auckland, and it seems there is more at stake than just a desire for flexible working conditions.

The bigger picture?

Commentators have identified it is possible the Ports of Auckland board are trying to prepare the company for being sold. Breaking one of the strongest unions in the country and driving ahead with the introduction of a casualised labour force to maximize and minimize employer responsibilities to employees will likely pave the way for changes to employment law, and if that was the case this would have an impact upon us all. It might be hard to realise but unions were forged out of strong Christian values, and the work of a union to uphold the rights of workers, especially in a culture where those rights are not given a real hearing.

Resources:

- www.munz.org.nz
- www.poal.co.nz
- tvnz.co.nz/national-news/ports-dispute-intended-break-union-expert-video-4686605
- bowalleyroad.blogspot.co.nz/2012/01/auckland-ports-dispute-open-letter-to.html
- www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=10781153