

Union ACTIVE

MWU
MEAT WORKERS UNION
WORKMATES. WHANAU. COMMUNITY.

Update June 2016

Lay-offs hard time for meat workers

Winter's here and lay-offs have begun. For some meat workers, seasonal lay off comes as a welcome break : their holiday pay will see them through the few weeks that apply. For others, it will be a struggle, as shorter seasons mean months without work. Some meat workers seek government support through WINZ but its not easy with stand-downs and unrealistic expectations (driven by government) to find other work in their small communities.

Here's one worker's story....

"We are living in a shed in the back yard of our relations' rented property. My husband worked nightshift and I worked dayshift so someone would always be at home to care for our kids. Since we were laid off, my husband has tried to find work out of the area because jobs are hard to come by locally. According to WINZ, we have earned too much and we will have to have a stand down period before we qualify for any government assistance. We've been trying to save money for a deposit for a home but we won't be able to do this now because of the lay off. Our holiday pay and other savings will have to fill the gap until one of us finds other employment."

Housing unaffordability is affecting meat workers in all regions of New Zealand.



Meat Industry Association seeks intervention in job security decision.

NZMWU members had a big win last year when the 1992 Richmond decision was overturned by a full bench of the Employment Court in a major NZMWU vs AFFCO case.

An important part of the decision was that AFFCO meat workers are continuous workers and their employment agreements are of indefinite duration, even between seasons. AFFCO appealed the decision and this will be heard in July.

Now the Meat Industry Association (MIA) has applied to intervene in the appeal, saying their members are concerned at the flow on effect to all meat companies. Members of the MIA include all the large meat companies, including Silver Fern Farms, Alliance and ANZCO.

Here's what MIA says in their affidavit :

"While key members (of the MIA) have advised they have no current intention to introduce, as AFFCO sought to do, new terms and conditions of employment at the start of a season, the Employment Court's approach may prevent that future option."

In other words, while they say they are not going to, they would like to. Our union will be defending this appeal, but all MWU members should take notice .

The picture on the header of this newsletter was drawn by the pupils of the Moerewa Primary School in Northland during the 2012 AFFCO lockout.

Profile : Margaret Tate Brinks Sub-Branch President

Margaret has worked for Brinks Poultry for more than 12 years. She's a truck driver but has had other roles. Margaret's union role started as the Transport delegate but she was soon nominated site delegate. Margaret says she was an outspoken woman that stood by the collective.

"The employer did try to sack me originally, but I am still here. I became a delegate because I saw workers treated unfairly. I would fight for these workers for what I thought was right and that's what I continue to do. Brinks have four sites in Auckland and workers have elected me Sub-Branch President. I oversee four work sites for Brinks MWU members at Tuakau, Karaka, Mangere and recently Mt Wellington."



"For me being part of the MWU has been the strength, determination and the prevailing faith that as a union we can help the workers."

Margaret Tate, MWU
Sub-Branch President,
Brinks, Auckland

Health & Safety about is about you and your work mates!

With new health & safety laws now occupying management's minds, we must remember the lesson from the 29 men who died at Pike River Mine : **never, ever** hand over the important job of protecting your health and safety at work to management.

Here's why :

Health & Safety is about workers. After all, it's your lives and limbs on the line. It's about improving working conditions and building our union. You can't do one without the other.

Management has different goals. Some enlightened management care about safety, but many others will be more concerned about workers' compensation costs. Building the union is never one of their goals.

Don't let your company appoint (or elect) your Health & Safety Reps. This is your choice, not theirs. It's your voice that they are supposed to listen to and engage with : because it's your safety on the line.

Safety programs that focus on behaviour and punish members for supposed breaches just tell our members they are the problem. In fact our members and our union are the solution.

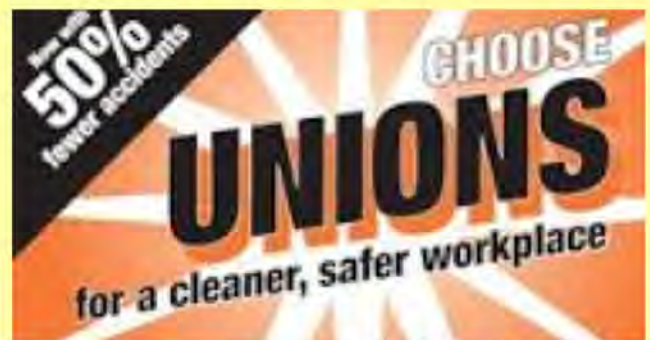
The best way to identify risks and hazards is for Health & Safety Reps to talk to every worker about their job and how to make it safer and easier. It's even better to involve that worker in pushing for improvements.

That's how we build our union through health & safety and at the same time assert our rights as workers to go home safely every day after work.

Other News :

Silver Fern Farm's Christchurch Venison plant, Islington, is closing. 47 MWU members received full union redundancy entitlements. The MWU has also agreed with SFF that any members who want to relocate to other sites in the group, such as their other South Island processing plants in Belfast, Pareora, Fairton, Hokitika and Finegand will be assisted to do so.

SFF announced that they will spend nearly \$5 million dollars building a venison chain at the Pareora site, south of Timaru. While the loss of the Islington site is a blow, SFF's big spending on the new chain at Pareora suggests the company is optimistic about the future of venison farming.



Follow the MWU campaign for more secure work in the Meat Industry :

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