ENROL TODAY: YOU MUST BE ENROLLED BY MIDNIGHT, 25 OCTOBER, TO BE ABLE TO VOTE

WORKERS FIRST

A Workers First Union Publication

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THE ELECTION ISSUE...

Authorised by Dennis Maga,
Workers First Union, 120 Church Street, Onehunga, Auckland.

WE SURVEYED THE SITTING PARLIAMENTARY POLITICAL PARTIES ON TEN ISSUES THAT MATTER FOR UNIONS AND WORKERS THIS ELECTION.

WHERE THEY STAND

	THE ISSUE	NATIONAL**	LABOUR	GREENS	NZ FIRST	ACT**	TE PĀTI MĀORI
1	Do you support introducing sectoral (industry-wide) collective bargaining, e.g. Fair Pay Agreements, so union-negotiated pay and conditions set a floor across an entire industry rather than being limited to individual workplaces?	✗ **	✓	✓	✗	✗ **	✓
2	Do you support a legal presumption that platform (gig economy) workers are employees with full employment rights, with the burden on companies to prove otherwise?	✗ **	~ *	✓	✗	✗ **	✓
3	Will your party commit to ratifying ILO Convention 193 on Decent Work in the Platform Economy, which the New Zealand government delegation voted against in June 2026?	✗ **	✓	✓	✗	✗ **	✓
4	Will your party commit to repealing the Employment Relations Amendment Act 2026, including the removal of the 30-day rule, and restrictions on personal grievance claims?	✗ **	✓	✓	~ *	✗ **	✓
5	Will your party commit to repealing the Health and Safety at Work Amendment Act 2026 before it takes effect in April 2027, including the narrowing of small businesses' duties to only "critical risks"?	✗ **	✓	✓	~ *	✗ **	✓
6	Do you support fully and sustainably funding New Zealand's ambulance services through public funding, moving toward a single, publicly owned and operated service rather than the current reliance on charity and co-payments?	✗ **	~ *	✓	✓ *	✗ **	✓
7	Do you support automatically enrolling new employees at unionised workplaces as union members after 30 days, unless they opt out?	✗ **	✓ *	✓	✗	✗	✓
8	Do you support giving workers up to four hours' paid leave a year to take part in civic activities like a council meeting, community event, or rally?	✗ **	~ *	✓	~	✗ **	✓
9	Do you support introducing modern slavery legislation that bans the sale of goods made with forced labour, requires large businesses to publicly report on modern slavery risk in their supply chains, and requires them to act on risks once identified?	✗ **	~ *	✓	~ *	✗ **	✓
10	Will your party commit to curbing excess profitability in the banking sector - whether through a windfall tax, a bank levy, or another mechanism of the party's choosing - to ensure banks' profits aren't made at the direct expense of New Zealand customers?	✗ **	~	✓	✓	✗ **	✓

** Further information provided by parties or additional analysis is included overleaf.*

*** The National Party and ACT did not provide answers to our questions, so we have attempted to summarise their positions based on publically available information.*

WHAT THEY SAID

Some of the political parties included additional information on their responses beyond what can be shown in the table above (marked with an asterisk*), which we can analyse in more detail.

Let's break this down, beginning with NZ First. In 'somewhat supporting' the repeal of the Employment Relations Amendment Act, the party says they "have reservations" about the legislation and would amend it given "sufficient electoral support" - which is to say they wouldn't repeal it because it's the right thing to do. This is unsurprising given NZ First supported the Bill all the way through Parliament and ignored critical feedback from unions like ours, then lied about it afterwards. (1)

Again, NZ First says it "has reservations" about the Health and Safety at Work Amendment Act and is concerned that it lowers workers' protections in small and medium businesses. They note that NZ First achieved a delayed implementation date for the Act. However, this is a party that voted FOR the same piece of damaging legislation that they now claim they might ditch it if re-elected - what a waste of time and money, we say.

It's worth noting that NZ First also provides misleading info to support their negative position on some of our issues; for example, claiming that existing contracting arrangements "encourage enterprise and self-employment", or that in rejecting Fair Pay Agreements, the party "favour(s) enterprise-level flexibility, productivity-led growth, and moderate annual minimum wage adjustments that protect small business viability." Neither of these claims stack up very well to our ears, especially given the Coalition's track record of cutting the effective minimum wage and the judgment of the Supreme Court regarding contractors.

In expressing support on our ask for a fully funded ambulance service, NZ First says it supports "funding St John Ambulance up to its requested 95%+ operational level" - which is not full funding or public ownership - and it's worth bearing in mind that despite making a coalition agreement pledge to increase funding to St John, the party has mostly taken credit for earlier Labour-led funding trajectories (2) and has not moved towards eventual public ownership in either practical or rhetorical terms.

Finally, in response to question 9 on ending modern slavery, NZ First says it is somewhat supportive and is opposed to human exploitation, and that it would support banning goods made with forced labour, "provided supply chain reporting requirements are practical and do not create unnecessary red tape for domestic enterprises". So, they would support an end to modern slavery in supply chains as long as business owners don't find living up to it too difficult - another very weak standard.

The Labour Party also provides additional information in their responses. On question 2 regarding gig workers, Labour says the party "opposed the current government's introduction of a "gateway test" and is supportive of protecting the rights of all working people", but they do not provide outright support for our policy point. On fully funding ambulances and moving towards public ownership of those services, Labour says that it "recognises the importance of our ambulance services and is committed to a fair and sustainable system," but again do not appear to offer explicit support for public ownership. In 'somewhat' supporting paid civic time off for workers, Labour says "all working people have a role to play in civic activities such as council meetings or community events" - which is, again, not quite the full ask in the question.

As for ACT and National, they did not reply to our survey. The ACT Party said they were busy and had 'capacity constraints', and National acknowledged our query but did not provide any response by the deadline. We find this disappointing given both parties responded to our queries during Election 2023 and had ample time to reply, but we have estimated their positions based on publicly available information (like their replies to the NZ Council of Trade Unions' similar survey, available at tinyurl.com/nzctuscores2026).

(1) www.rnz.co.nz/news/politics/587457/union-hits-back-at-nz-first-over-employment-relations-amendment-bill

(2) https://www.workersfirst.nz/ambulance-report

The full text of the responses from the Labour Party and NZ First are available on our website at tinyurl.com/policyscores2026.

You can compare full party policies by visiting their websites:

national.org.nz | labour.org.nz | greens.org.nz
nzfirst.nz | act.org.nz | maoriparty.org.nz

WHAT WE THINK

By Dennis Maga, Workers First General Secretary

This is the most important election for decades, and a choice between two very different paths for Aotearoa New Zealand.

Two realistic possibilities exist for the formation of our next government – either a re-election of the current Coalition (likely comprised of National, ACT and NZ First) or a new government led by Labour and the Greens.

The results of our political survey on the opposite page tell you a lot about where the parties stand on some of the major issues for workers and unions, and you can check out the NZCTU's policy scorecards online for more info on the parties' policies on issues like health, education, the economy and more.

But if we put aside what parties say they're going to do for a moment, we should consider everything that's happened over the last three years. For Workers First, it has been one of the toughest terms of government in our union's history, perhaps only rivalled by the brutal reforms of the early 1990s. This Coalition Government has behaved barbarically when it comes to workers' rights; torching and pillaging decades of progress overnight and mostly getting away with it.

We are not an 'affiliated' union – meaning we do not associate with any one political party in particular – and we typically back the best ideas for workers, which – let's face it – usually come from Labour over National. But this election, we are making our position much more explicit: we must change this Government immediately, and Labour, the Greens and Te Pāti Māori are the best and only way to do this. I want to tell you why the status quo is intolerable, and how things could get even worse.

As Prime Minister, Christopher Luxon will probably be most remembered as the man who was outwitted by his Coalition partners – ACT and NZ First – who have dominated the limelight and pushed National even further to the right since 2023. On one hand, David Seymour and Brooke van Velden have been allowed free rein to gut long-standing employment law, while Winston Peters and NZ First have joined the global culture war and regressed into racist and xenophobic attacks on migrants. All three parties have attacked Te Tiriti o Waitangi, our founding document, and mobilised an anti-Māori sentiment among the worst people in society. Additionally, NZ First have failed to stand up to ACT and failed to back workers and communities when it mattered most. They did not step in during the devastating closure of at least seven mills during this term of Government and voted in favour of the unholy trifecta of anti-worker legislation – the Employment Relations Amendment Bill, the Health and Safety at Work Amendment Bill, and the Employment Leave Bill.

You may have heard a lot of this before, especially in this magazine. Three years has meant constant attack on unions and lots of redundancies and roadblocks when it comes to organising workers and fighting for fairness in the workplace. But I fear the worst is yet to come – whether in the form of continued attacks on unions (e.g. restricting our right to visit members in workplaces, limiting our ability to collect membership fees), continued negligence on the economy (e.g. more real-terms minimum wage cuts, a spiralling cost of living, more austerity for public services), and more division and hate between New Zealanders (e.g. continued attacks on Te Tiriti, slashing the rights of migrants).

So this election, we encourage you to use your vote to change the government and take the power back from the parties that have reduced your rights.

WHAT'S AHEAD

While we're keen to see a new and more progressive government elected in 2026, there are major challenges ahead and urgent priorities to attend to.

The first and most important issue to tackle is lifting New Zealanders' incomes. We are falling behind our OECD peers on pay. We have one of the highest rates of workforce participation among comparable countries, but we take home less pay than many of them. Minimum wage increases have not kept pace with inflation, and employers are not taking the living wage seriously. The next government must act quickly to raise the minimum wage above inflation and adopt a sectoral bargaining model like Fair Pay Agreements to raise the wage floor in industries like retail, transport and care and support work. And to ensure the worst of the last Government does not linger long, they must urgently repeal damaging legislation (described above) that is dragging us backwards.

We are also struggling to keep skilled workers in New Zealand; something that immediately brings our ambulance service members to mind. We desperately hope that at last, a future government will recognise the insanity of relying on part-charity-funded ambulance services and bring them back into public ownership. It's hard to find a New Zealander who would not support this.

Getting a handle on the 'gig economy' and the disruption caused by technological adoption is also crucial. We've seen a slow slide towards casualisation over the last decade – basically employers misclassifying workers as contractors to limit their obligation to offer a minimum wage, guaranteed hours, annual and sick leave, etc. – and we need to make sure that international companies like Uber can't keep taking advantage of our lax employment law in New Zealand. Ratifying the International Labour Organisation's Convention on Decent Work in the Platform Economy – which was adopted in June, though our Coalition Government voted against – would go a long way to ending that kind of exploitation.

Finally, we need to bring back some positivity into our politics and our society, and the next government has a major role in this. We must celebrate what makes New Zealand truly great – our diversity, our creativity, and our uniqueness – and bring back some mana to the working class of our country, which has spent the last three years under attack, belittled and divided. We, the working people of Aotearoa, are the beating heart of our country and the strongest possible force for change – and we are ready to take our place at the table.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT

JOIN GIG WORKERS FIRST

GIGWORKERSFIRST.NZ



GIG WORKERS FIRST IS HERE

Rideshare and food delivery drivers now have a union home of their own. On 1 September, we launched Gig Workers First, a new section of Workers First for app-based workers on Uber, DiDi, Bolt, Uber Eats, DoorDash, Delivereasy, Hungry Panda, Flamingo Food, Menulog and other platforms.

Wellington Mayor Andrew Little spoke in support at the launch in Kilbirnie.

"We beat Uber in court, and now we know the ins and outs of this industry better than anyone," says Deputy Secretary Anita Rosentreter. "We're inviting all gig workers to join us and continue the movement for better pay, better treatment and a better working life."

Gig Workers First means every app-based driver has somewhere to turn: for advice, for help fighting an unfair deactivation (which can happen with no warning and no explanation), and for the organising strength that has already won drivers real results. Membership is $3.40 a week, lower than our standard fee.

Here's what we're fighting for:

- Repealing the changes to section 6 of the Employment Relations Act and restoring a fair test of employment status.
- A legal presumption that platform workers are employees.
- Collective bargaining for drivers and couriers, once those changes are won.
- Ratification of the ILO's Convention on Decent Work in the Platform Economy, adopted in June but opposed by our Coalition Government.

Gig Workers First grows out of a four-year fight. Workers First and E tū took four Uber drivers' case through three courts, and in November 2025 the Supreme Court unanimously ruled they were employees. That opened the door for more than 1,600 current and former drivers, and in August we reached a settlement with Uber to compensate them for benefits they should have received as employees, which we are very close to finalising.

The Coalition Government then rewrote section 6 of the Employment Relations Act in response to the court judgments, introducing a "gateway test" that blocks gig workers from claiming employee status for work done since February. Basically, our drivers won in court and then had the goalposts moved by lawmakers. It's the same story we see across the economy: employers labelling workers as contractors so they can skip paying things like a minimum wage, holiday pay and sick leave.

Far from seeing the Government's law changes as a defeat, we're actually on a winning streak and determined to keep organising these workers.

If you drive or deliver for an app, or know someone who does, join at workersfirst.nz/join-us. The more of us there are, the harder we are to ignore.

UNDERSTAFFED AND UNDER THREAT:

RETAIL STAFF SAFETY SURVEY 2026

Retail workers in understaffed stores are more than twice as likely to have experienced a safety incident as those in well-staffed stores, our survey of 2,403 retail workers found. Retail workers already know what would help. This report asked them, and they told us, clearly and in their own words.

The survey, one of the largest of retail workers conducted in Aotearoa, points to a single underlying cause running through nearly every finding: understaffing. Workers in stores that are always understaffed reported a safety incident at more than twice the rate of those in well-staffed stores (70% vs 30%) and were nearly five times less likely to always feel safe at work (11% vs 52%).

Asked what single measure would most improve their safety, the top answer by far was simply more staff (38%) - ranking well ahead of cameras, guards, or any other specific security measure.

"Understaffing is a health and safety issue and not some kind of smart business decision for an employer who's looking to cut costs.

Employers must be held accountable for understaffing their stores and putting workers' safety at risk to save money."

Rudd Hughes,
Workers First Deputy Secretary

KEY FINDINGS

- 61% of respondents said things had gotten worse for retail workers over the last year, and 53% expect things to get worse again over the next year.
- Among workers who had experienced a safety-related problem, 61% felt stressed or anxious as a result, and 35% said they dreaded coming to work.
- Only 57% of workers who experienced a safety incident reported it to their employer. Of those who did report, only 49% were satisfied with how it was handled.
- Nearly one in three respondents (31%) said they'd received insufficient or no training in responding to violent or abusive customers.
- 59% of respondents experienced at least one form of customer-related abuse or harassment in the last two years. Verbal abuse was the most common, affecting 43% of respondents.
- Only 21% of retail workers said they always feel safe at work. A further 38% usually feel safe; meaning 41% feel safe only sometimes, rarely, or never.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics also affected the results. Women were 9% more likely than men to have experienced a customer-related safety incident (59% vs 54%). Non-binary and gender-diverse respondents were substantially more affected, at 86% (noting that this group had a small sample size of 29). The gap widens further for specific forms of harassment, with twice as many women reporting sexist comments from customers, which rose to ten times the male rate for non-binary and gender-diverse respondents. Bunnings and Mitre 10 had the highest reported incident rates.



The solutions are not complicated: safe staffing levels, robust legal protections, strong unions, and a Fair Pay Agreement framework that sets a wage floor for the whole sector rather than leaving it to the goodwill of individual employers. Above all else, retailers must start to recognise that staffing levels are a health and safety issue, and employers who continue to understaff their stores as a business practice must be held accountable for putting workers in danger.

"When I first started 12 years ago, the business had a lot more perks and felt more family orientated. Now you're treated as just a number and just a worker to come in and do the job."

"The profession as a whole is undervalued, even though it is essential."

"We are consistently understaffed in all functions… everyone is burnt out, customers are agitated over lack of staffing and lack of full shelves due to longstanding supply issues."

"Sort out (the) staffing issue so all employees feel safe. It all stems from the top."

"Constant abuse about not having enough staff on and groceries thrown at me as well as money."

"I constantly go home mentally and physically exhausted due to being so understaffed. Every time this is raised (usually through staffing review form) the [store manager] always has an excuse. Nothing is actually done about it. It's affecting my home-life as im so exhausted at the end of the day and on my days off"



CLICK TO READ THE REPORT

FIXING OUR SUPERMARKETS

With the 7 November election approaching, more parties are promising cheaper supermarkets. Here's what each is proposing.

National and NZ First: Pak'nSave, New World and Four Square stores are run by separate owner-operators, but every store belongs to one of two Foodstuffs co-operatives (North Island or South Island) that share wholesale, warehousing, marketing and freight. That scale makes it very hard for smaller grocers and new entrants to compete. NZ First wants to split Foodstuffs into two competing co-operatives, with Pak'nSave on its own. National proposes something similar, but only if the Commerce Commission recommends it. The idea is that the separated chains would compete harder.

But what else might they compete on? Cutting workers' wages. In 2023, these parties scrapped the Fair Pay Agreements that were about to lift wages and conditions for supermarket workers nationwide. Introducing competition to the market does not fix this issue.

Labour: Foodstuffs and Woolworths each run retail and wholesale businesses. Their wholesale arms supply their own stores and their rivals, so smaller grocers and new entrants must buy from competitors who can raise prices. Labour would separate wholesale from retail at both companies and require wholesalers to deal fairly with competitors. The party says it would also tighten rules on supplier fees and ban price gouging on essentials including groceries, energy, fuel, telecommunications, banking and insurance. There are good ideas here, but we want Labour to restore Fair Pay Agreements under urgency in its first 100 days. Then supermarkets would truly compete on quality, not on who pays workers least.

Greens: The boldest plan yet: requiring Foodstuffs and Woolworths to sell at least 120 stores and distribution capacity to a publicly owned chain, KiwiMart, with owners compensated. It would put affordability ahead of profit and bring serious competition. Like Labour, the Greens would ban price gouging, and they introduced a Bill to that effect in August (the coalition didn't take it up). We'd also expect the Greens to back reinstating FPAs, in line with their other pro-worker policies, like making union membership opt-out instead of opt-in.

All of these are market-based solutions to the problem of competition, but none of these policies will, on their own, improve the pay or conditions of supermarket workers – for that, we still need a sectoral bargaining method like a Fair Pay Agreement to set minimum conditions across the industry.



WOOLWORTHS CUTS 130 CUSTOMER CARE JOBS

On 29 September, Woolworths confirmed it will close its New Zealand Customer Care Centre and move around 130 jobs to Sydney. We know how hard this news has been for the people affected, and we want to offer our solidarity after a tough year.

Our members and organisers took part in the consultation process, which began on 1 September, and put their concerns to the company. Members had already shown resolve last Christmas, when they took three strikes in two weeks to resist cuts to their conditions, including their right to work remotely. Woolworths locked them out for two days in response.

We think the decision is short-sighted. Woolworths recently reported $163 million in earnings and expects to save about $4.1 million by 2029, roughly one percent of what it spent on its ill-judged $400 million store rebrand. It also loses years of local knowledge that customers rely on. Our members spent this year helping train new AI tools, and they understand that work will now be used to train their replacements in Australia.

We also expect this may not be the end of it. Affected workers are already cautioning that the Hub jobs taking on this work could be offshored again. Similar roles have been advertised in Manila, and part of Australia's contact centre has already been outsourced.

Woolworths says it is exploring redeployment options, and we will be working to make sure that happens wherever possible. But many of these workers are sole parents working remotely, and comparable roles in the regions are limited.

Thank you to everyone who wrote to Woolworths and supported our members. We will keep pushing to make sure every affected worker is treated fairly.

NORTHLAND MILL CLOSES AS GOVT. STANDS ASIDE

Northland Mill in Kaitāia closed for good on 7 August, two weeks early, ending around 60 jobs. To our members and their whānau: we stand with you and will keep supporting you.

It didn't have to end this way. Northland's councils and Northland NZ urged the Government to invest, citing modelling of a return within five years. We called for it to facilitate a sale, run the mill temporarily or guarantee operations until a buyer emerged. It did none of those.

Acting Prime Minister David Seymour gave the idea short shrift, saying any money might only delay the closure, and that the Government would rather avoid that track. He left it to Regional Development Minister Shane Jones to take any proposal to Cabinet.

Minister Jones was born in Awanui, just up the road, and his party presents itself as a champion of the regions. Yet he was lukewarm, citing the views of Seymour and Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and saying the Government had to be "very careful, in spending Crown money, that we do not imperil the other mills." This was despite potential buyers for Northland Mill having approached Kānoa, the Government's regional development unit, wanting to work with it. He promised no funding.

> This is the seventh wood processing site to close under this Government, with over 800 industry jobs lost.

Under the union's collective agreement, workers were paid out to the original closure date, with a wage increase and back pay. Some took voluntary redundancy, others moved to the Triboard Mill, whose future remains uncertain. A new one-year agreement signed just before the closure could, however, transfer to a new employer, so we hope a buyer steps in and can facilitate this.

We thank the local and government agencies supporting those affected.

AROUND OUR UNION

Woolworths Customer Care Centre - Woolworths has moved about 130 Aotearoa New Zealand customer care centre jobs to Australia. Workers First has been working to ensure Woolworths lives up to its redundancy obligations, pursues redeployment wherever possible and desirable, and does right by every worker. Read more in this issue's article.

Wellington Free Ambulance - Our members have accepted the Terms of Settlement (ToS).

Ambulance - Faye McCann, our Organiser for Ambulance and other Emergency Medical Services, has been re-elected as vice president of the Australasian Council of Ambulance Unions.

Stop Work Meetings (SWMs) - Thank you to everyone who attended our Stop Work Meetings around the motu.

Retail Safe Staffing Survey - Thank you to everyone who filled out our staffing survey, which showed particularly negative trends in regards to understaffing. Read more in this issue's article.

Safe Rates - ITF's (International Transport Workers' Federation) global Safe Rates action week took place the week of 29 June. Workers First Union organisers visited truck stops and other locations where drivers congregate and had conversations with them about the union and Safe Rates.

Quality Bakers - The South Island agreement has been ratified, including a significant improvement to long-service leave.

Spotless (Taylor's Laundry) - The national MUCA (Multiple Union Collective Agreement) with E tū has been ratified, including KiwiSaver for over 65-year-olds.

Uber claim settlements - We reached an important milestone, signing a deed with Uber relating to the claims we raised on behalf of 1,600+ Uber drivers. The company will start sending out claim settlement offers to drivers soon.

Gig Workers First - We launched Gig Workers First in September a new union group dedicated to organising rideshare and food delivery drivers who work for Uber, DiDi, Doordash, Bolt, DeliverEasy and other app-based platforms. Tell your driver.

Lineage DC - Our members have ratified their deal, achieving a pay increase over inflation, overtime rates and full First Guardian Insurance for Union members.

Progressive lockout anniversary - August 25 marked the 20th anniversary of the start of the Progressive lockout, a great tale of solidarity and victory in Workers First's history.

RETAIL ROUNDUP

Farmers - Bargaining has gone into the mediation stage.

Foodstuffs DC - Bargaining has been completed at Foodstuffs North Island with an excellent 2 year agreement.

The Warehouse - Members overwhelmingly ratified the agreement.

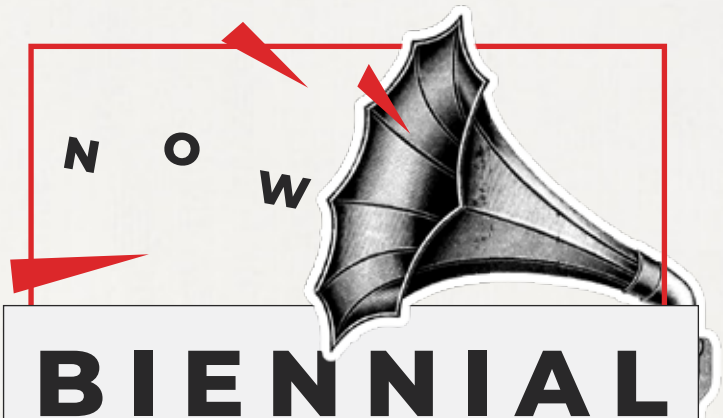
Woolworths, IKEA & Bunnings - Bargaining is ongoing.

FINANCE ROUNDUP

Westpac - Congratulations to Westpac Terrace End, Palmerston North, where they have achieved 100% union membership!

Finance - The majority of our bank members, across companies, are still in bargaining and negotiations. They are facing stiff opposition despite banks reporting billions in profit .

...and more. For specific updates please speak to your organiser.



BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

We are looking forward to welcoming many of our delegates to the 2026 Workers First Biennial conference!

17-19 November

Hamilton

Attendees will receive further details via email. Please talk to your organiser if you have remaining questions.



WOMEN'S NETWORK

The Biennial Women's Conference was held in Auckland in September and was well-attended by women delegates from around the motu. Congratulations to Michelle McKenzie, a delegate from Woolworths in Christchurch, who was re-elected to the role of Women's Representative on the National Executive for a term of two years. It was resolved to elect a Women's Committee to meet between conferences. A remit to this effect has been put to the Biennial Conference.

Want to join the Women's Network? You can do so by changing your preferences on your 'MyPage' on the Workers First website or by getting in touch with your organiser or Workers First support team.

THE LIVING WAGE IS NOW $29.90

The Living Wage is calculated using the latest data and is the income necessary to enable workers and their families to live with dignity, afford the basic essentials and participate as active citizens in society. The current Living Wage rate applies from 1 September 2026 - 31 August 2027, at which point the rate is re-calculated.

More info about the Living Wage: www.livingwage.org.nz

WORKERS FIRST'S AMBULANCE PROFESSIONALS

Here, we sum up the recent news and issues affecting our ambulance members at St John and Wellington Free Ambulance.

- **St John bargaining:** We've been negotiating a new collective agreement with St John since June. There's been some progress, but the major sticking point is St John's plan to replace comprehensive medical insurance with a wellness allowance, leaving members to fund their own cover. For some older members, that could cost up to $14,000 a year. Pay increases and overtime rates are also unresolved. Our bargaining team returns to the table on 9 November and we're hopeful of a good deal. We're also working towards closer cooperation with NZAA/AWUNZ, including sharing our communications with members.
- **Record demand:** Ambulance services are struggling with unprecedented callouts, leading to much longer waits and putting pressure on the wider health system. St John set a daily record of 2,606 calls in August and activated its major incident response. For members, that means finishing late, missing breaks and extra shifts while St John runs short rather than staffing adequately with more 'expensive' ECPs and CCPs. Members feel St John is happy to rely on their goodwill, until it costs money.
- **New prescribing rights:** Paramedics are getting prescribing rights, starting with ECPs, to help fill gaps in primary care. Our members see the value, but with so many people unable to get in to see a GP, it's a band-aid solution. We need good data on how much of that gap paramedics are filling, and we're worried that invisible work will simply mean more work.
- **Paid breastfeeding breaks at WFA:** Wellington Free Ambulance has introduced paid breastfeeding and expressing breaks. Legally these are only an unpaid entitlement, which can be hard to manage on an ambulance. WFA's are paid, in addition to rest and meal breaks, and ambulances will carry portable fridges for those expressing. The breaks can only be interrupted for purple calls (cardiac or respiratory arrests). WFA is also the only ambulance service in New Zealand offering additional benefits for those on paid parental or partner leave.
- **A paramedics council:** Exciting news: we're setting up an internal paramedics council covering the sites that employ paramedics, including ambulances and heli medics. Made up of delegates from each company where we represent members, it will set the strategic direction for our union's work. We'll be in touch.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Bill Bradford



We've spent a lot of pages on policy, so let me finish this issue with something simpler.

Think about the people in this issue: the ambulance crews finishing late and skipping breaks so someone else's family gets help. The Kaitāia mill workers who turned local timber into veneer. The supermarket customer care team who trained the AI tools that will now train their replacements. Every one of them was doing the job, and every one of them was treated as a cost to cut.

Here's what I've learned in this movement: decisions like that get made because someone assumes we'll take it. They expect us to keep our heads down, grumble in the smoko room, stay home on voting day. A lot of people in power are counting on exactly that.

But elections are decided by who turns up – not by who has the biggest advertising budget, but by ordinary people who decided that ten minutes spent voting was worth it.

So here's my ask: make sure you're enrolled by October 25. Vote, and vote early if you can. Then do the thing that really matters: talk to three people, at work or at home, who weren't planning to vote. Ask what matters to them. Talk to them about some of the issues raised in this magazine.

And whichever way it goes, here's my promise: on 8 November, we're still here. A union isn't an event every three years. It's the people beside you, bargaining, organising, turning up every day no matter what. That's where the real power sits, and a better government simply gives us more room to use it.

Nothing works without putting workers first. Let's remind everyone.

NOW ACCEPTING SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS

Applications close 20 January 2027



NORTHERN DRIVERS' CHARITABLE TRUST

SKILLS & TRAINING SCHOLARSHIPS

Financial assistance for part or full-time training in New Zealand toward trades, skills or tertiary qualifications.

Visit driverstrust.org.nz to apply

WORKERS FIRST

Bill Bradford *President*
Dennis Maga *General Secretary*
Faye McCann *Contributor*
Benny Atkins *Contributor*
Rhydian Thomas *Communications & Strategy Manager*
Simon Hartman *General Communications Officer*
Kemelyen *Illustration*

WORKERSFIRST.NZ
contact@workersfirst.nz
09 622 8355