

Workers' Rights and Employment Policy

Decent Work, Fair Wages, and Democratic Workplaces

The Alliance believes that **secure, fairly paid, meaningful work is a basic human right**.

A prosperous society should not depend upon low wages, insecure employment, or the weakening of workers' rights. Every person who works should be able to earn a decent living, work in a safe environment, spend time with their family, and participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their workplace.

The Alliance rejects the idea that workers' wages and conditions should be treated simply as costs to be minimised in a competitive labour market.

We will rebuild the bargaining power of working people, strengthen trade unions, establish decent minimum standards, and give workers a genuine voice in the management and direction of their workplaces.

1. Work Is a Basic Right

Every person has the right to the opportunity for meaningful, secure, and fairly paid employment.

The Alliance will pursue **full employment** as a central economic objective.

Where the private economy fails to provide sufficient employment, the government will directly intervene through publicly funded apprenticeship, employment, and infrastructure programmes.

These programmes will provide useful work in areas including:

- infrastructure;
- housing;
- environmental restoration;
- conservation;
- community services;
- public transport;
- regional development.

Unemployment should not be treated as an inevitable feature of the economy.

A government committed to full employment must be prepared to create work where the market fails to do so.

2. A 35-Hour Working Week

The Alliance will establish a **35-hour standard working week without loss of earnings**.

The 35-hour week will be accompanied by appropriate protections to ensure that employers cannot simply increase work intensity or use unpaid overtime to circumvent the reduction in hours.

Workers will have:

- a statutory right to refuse unreasonable hours or shifts;
- mandatory penal rates for overtime;
- proper payment for all hours worked;
- protection from pressure to work excessive hours.

Reducing working hours should improve quality of life, family time, and community participation while allowing the benefits of increased productivity to be shared with workers.

3. Five Weeks' Paid Annual Leave

The Alliance will guarantee a minimum of **five weeks' paid annual leave** for all workers.

Annual leave is not simply a workplace benefit. It is essential to health, family life, and the ability of workers to participate fully in their communities.

4. Paid Parental and Family Leave

Workers should not have to choose between employment and their responsibilities to their families.

The Alliance will provide **52 weeks of paid parental leave**, available to all workers, including:

- part-time workers;
- casual workers;
- seasonal workers.

The Alliance will also establish paid compassionate leave for workers who need to attend funerals, tangi, or deal with serious family circumstances.

Employment law will require employers to properly recognise and accommodate workers' family and whānau responsibilities.

The principle will be simple:

Work should fit around family life, not family life around work.

5. A Living Wage and Protection Against Inflation

The minimum wage should provide a genuine standard of living rather than simply represent the minimum amount an employer can legally pay.

The Alliance will immediately increase the adult minimum wage to **two-thirds of the average wage**, with the adult minimum applying to workers of all ages.

From there we will establish mechanisms to protect workers' purchasing power from inflation, including automatic annual wage adjustments linked to movements in the cost of living. This would include consideration of the consumer price index (CPI) and average ordinary time hourly earnings from the quarterly employment survey (QES).

Economic growth should translate into rising living standards for working people.

6. Equal Pay and Pay Equity

Women and other groups of workers have historically been undervalued in the labour market.

The Alliance supports the re-introduction of comprehensive **Pay Equity legislation** to ensure equal pay for work of equal value.

The legislation will:

- allow comparisons across different industries and occupations;
- provide effective mechanisms for collective claims;
- allow workers to pursue class-wide or occupational pay equity claims;
- establish a clear process for resolving claims;
- aim to achieve genuine pay equity within three years.

Pay equity must address not only discrimination between people doing the same job, but the historical undervaluing of predominantly female occupations.

7. Wage Theft Is Theft

The deliberate underpayment of workers must be treated seriously. Employers who knowingly steal workers' wages will face prosecution and meaningful penalties.

Workers should not have to spend years pursuing money they have already earned.

8. Investigation and Prosecution of Breaches

The Alliance Party will support adequate funding and resourcing for bodies tasked with monitoring and making judicial decisions on Health & Safety, workplace conditions, breaches of employment law, and worker exploitation.

Namely, we will ensure the Employment Relations Authority is given adequate resourcing and power so that cases are heard and ruled on in a timely manner. A new Workplace Safety Authority will be established to hear cases regarding health,

safety, and wellbeing in the workplace and relieve the backlog of cases from the Employment Relations Authority. We will also increase the authority and size of the Labour Inspectorate.

Working people must not wallow in unsafe, unfair, or unlawful conditions for extended periods of time waiting for justice.

9. Restore Collective Bargaining Power

Individual workers are rarely equal in bargaining power to their employer.

Collective bargaining is therefore essential to achieving fair wages and decent conditions.

The Alliance will restore and strengthen a coordinated **national system of wage determination**, providing minimum standards across industries and occupations.

Collective agreements will provide a floor below which employment conditions cannot fall.

The Alliance will strengthen the ability of workers to bargain collectively through their unions and will ensure that employment law supports rather than undermines collective organisation.

10. A Strong and Democratic Trade Union Movement

Trade unions are fundamental democratic institutions.

The Alliance will protect workers' rights to:

- join a union;
- form a union;
- organise collectively;
- bargain collectively;
- participate in union activities;
- vote on union membership arrangements;
- receive union assistance at work.

Unions will have the legal right to meet and organise workers in groups during working hours, subject to reasonable arrangements for the workplace.

Pacific and migrant workers will have access to **state-funded, mother-tongue interpreters** where necessary to participate fully in union activities and employment negotiations.

11. Restore the Right to Strike

The right to withdraw labour is a fundamental democratic right.

The Alliance will restore a broad right to strike, including protection for:

- industrial action over employment conditions;
- solidarity and sympathy strikes;
- collective action in support of other workers;
- appropriate political strikes.

Workers should not be required to surrender their collective power simply because they enter employment.

The right to strike is the necessary counterbalance to the power of employers.

12. Workplace Democracy

Workers should have a genuine voice in the decisions that affect their working lives.

The Alliance will legislate for **Work Councils in enterprises employing more than fifty workers**.

Work Councils will provide workers with a formal role in decisions concerning:

- workplace organisation;
- health and safety;
- restructuring;
- training;
- technological change;
- employment conditions;
- major changes affecting the workforce.

In enterprises employing more than 250 workers, workers will have the right to elect **Worker Directors** to the governing board.

This will begin the transformation of workplaces from institutions where workers simply receive instructions into institutions in which workers have a genuine democratic voice.

13. Protect Workers During Restructuring

Workers should not be treated as disposable whenever a company experiences financial difficulties or decides to restructure.

Where significant redundancies are proposed, employers will be required to:

- provide workers and their representatives with relevant financial information;

- negotiate alternatives to redundancy with unions;
- provide at least one month's notice of dismissal;
- genuinely examine alternatives to job losses;
- consider redeployment and retraining.

Where a business is facing serious financial difficulty, workers and their representatives should have access to sufficient information to participate meaningfully in determining its future.

14. A National Retraining and Redeployment Programme

Where technological change, restructuring, or economic circumstances make jobs genuinely redundant, workers should not simply be left unemployed.

The Alliance will establish state-funded **retraining, redeployment, and relocation programmes**.

These programmes will help affected workers move into:

- new occupations;
- growing industries;
- essential public services;
- regional employment opportunities;
- further education and vocational training.

A dedicated employer contribution or levy will help fund the programme.

The costs of economic restructuring should not be carried solely by the workers who lose their jobs.

15. Protect Precarious and Vulnerable Workers

Workers in insecure employment are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

The Alliance will establish a comprehensive **Minimum Employment Code** covering workers who are currently vulnerable because they are:

- non-unionised;
- employed through agencies;
- contractors;
- casual workers;
- seasonal workers;
- in other precarious forms of employment.

Employment status must not be used as a mechanism for avoiding basic employment rights.

The Alliance will ensure that workers performing essentially the same work receive comparable minimum protections regardless of the contractual structure used by their employer.

16. Regulate Contracting and Labour Hire

Employers should not be able to undermine wages and conditions simply by replacing permanent employees with contractors or labour-hire workers.

The Alliance will strengthen regulation of:

- labour-hire companies;
- contracting arrangements;
- dependent contractors;
- casual employment;
- outsourcing.

Where contracting is used primarily to avoid employment obligations, workers will be entitled to appropriate protections.

The objective is to ensure that **employment status cannot become a loophole for exploitation.**

17. Work, Childcare and Community Life

A decent employment system must recognise that workers have lives outside the workplace.

The Alliance will establish **non-profit, community-based 24-hour childcare**, jointly funded by government and employers, to support workers whose employment requires non-standard hours.

This will particularly assist:

- shift workers;
- night workers;
- healthcare workers;
- transport workers;
- emergency workers;
- hospitality and service workers;
- single parents.

Childcare should be treated as essential social infrastructure supporting both families and the economy.

18. Health and Safety at Work

Every worker has the right to return home safely at the end of the working day.

The Alliance will restore and maintain strong statutory health and safety protections and ensure that workers and their unions have a meaningful role in workplace safety.

Employers will be required to provide safe workplaces, appropriate training, and adequate resources to manage workplace risks.

Workers will have effective rights to raise safety concerns without fear of retaliation.

Health and safety representatives and unions will be supported in monitoring workplace safety.

19. Workers' Rights and Economic Policy

Workers' rights cannot be separated from wider economic policy.

The Alliance will pursue an economic system based on:

- full employment;
- rising real wages;
- strong collective bargaining;
- public investment;
- productive industry;
- regional development;
- worker participation;
- economic security.

We reject the concept of **"labour market flexibility"** when it is used to mean weaker wages, insecure work, fewer rights, and the transfer of economic risk from employers to workers.

Flexibility should work for workers as well as employers.

Our Vision for Work in Aotearoa New Zealand

The Alliance believes that a decent society should guarantee that people who work can live with dignity.

We will build an employment system in which:

- work provides a living wage;
- employment is secure;
- hours are reasonable;
- families have time together;
- workers receive proper leave;
- women receive equal pay for work of equal value;
- unions have genuine power;
- workers have a voice in their workplaces;
- redundancy does not mean abandonment;
- and no worker is exploited because of their employment status.

The Alliance's objective is not simply to improve employment law.

It is to rebalance economic power between employers and workers.

A productive economy should benefit the people who create its wealth. The people who work in our workplaces must have a fair share of that wealth, a genuine voice in its distribution, and democratic rights over the conditions under which they work.