

NZJER Special Issue: The General Election in New Zealand in 2020

Editorial

It is tradition for the editors of the *New Zealand Journal of Employment Relations* to publish a special issue on the employment relations manifestos of the different political parties, prior to a general election. This 2020 election campaign is unusual as it takes place against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic of which the effects have permeated the debates on the economy, employment relations, social welfare, etc. In this issue, we have five articles setting out the different perspectives of the key players. In the first article, Danaë Anderson, Erling Rasmussen and Barry Foster report on employment relations policies of the two major parties, namely National and Labour. They note that, initially, there appeared to be little difference between the policy positions of the two parties, but this has changed dramatically during the election campaign. There also appears to be no comprehensive plan from either party of how to establish a sustainable, high skill and highly productive economy along with associated workplace relationships.

Under the Mixed Member Proportion (MMP) electoral system, the minor political parties and their policy positions are also important as these parties have normally influenced the formation of the government. Julianne Molineaux and Peter Skilling focus on four of the more prominent minor parties: ACT; Green; New Zealand First; and Māori. Their article provides an insightful overview of the employment relations position of each party and highlights the spread of public policy positions. They conclude that more substantial changes to the employment relations landscape look far more likely if the 2020 election delivers a government where Labour is not reliant on forging a consensus with New Zealand First as well as with the Greens.

Richard Wagstaff, President of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU), provides a trade union perspective on employment relations. He charts the changes to the laws affecting employment relations from 2017 onwards and highlights the impact that the Labour Coalition Government has had as a legislator and as a direct employer. In the longer term, the NZCTU is keen to see a more strategic and fundamental shift in the policy settings and for government leadership to take New Zealand toward a fairer, more productive, and low carbon economy.

In his article, Paul Mackay, from Business New Zealand, puts forward the employer perspective and argues for a slow-down in the pace of employment relations reforms. While a possible simplification of the Holidays Act is supported, there are real concerns associated with higher statutory minima, and the labour market and bargaining dynamics from Fair Pay Agreements and Equal Pay claims. In light of the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, looking after business prosperity should be, it is argued, a must for any incoming government.

The editors also invited Professor Nigel Haworth to write a commentary on the current and future status of employment relations both here in New Zealand and overseas. Echoing other polemics on neoliberalism (see for example, Quinlan, (2020) and van Barneveld et al., (2020)), Haworth argues that there is an alternative to a return to neo-liberalism available to government and policy makers and that, if the alternative is to be realised, “it will be driven by a government committed to fundamental transformation, and willing to forge the bonds that unite the tripartite parties in that endeavour”.

Associate Professor, Dr Felicity Lamm
Professor Erling Rasmussen
Associate Professor, Dr Bernard Walker

Co-Editors, *New Zealand Journal of Employment Relations*

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