

THE 'KINGMAKERS' PLANS FOR EMPLOYMENT LAW

The recent change of Government will, as has traditionally been the case, mean a change to New Zealand's employment law. The question is, given the centre-right make-up of the Coalition Government, how much change will actually occur.

While National hold the reins, it is important to remember that the three other minority parties who make up the Coalition Government - ACT, The Maori Party and United Future - also have firm policies in relation to the area of employment law.

This article will discuss the possible impact of the minority parties on New Zealand's employment law over the next three years as part of the Coalition Government.

ACT

ACT has four main goals in their employment policy:

- repeal the Employment Relations Act 2000;
- abolish all minimum wage laws and cut taxes significantly;
- abolish the specialist Employment Court and all other specialist employment authorities; and
- introduce a work test and a 40-hour work or training week on eligibility for the unemployment benefit and those on the DPB with children older than five.

Obviously ACT's views are more right wing than most, and given the centre right leaning of the current Coalition Government, it is unlikely that any of these policies will hold much sway.

UNITED FUTURE

United promotes a modern and flexible labour market that is stable. Its focus is on amending the current legislation rather than introducing new employment law legislation. It is United's policy to:

- improve workplace literacy;
- review general grievance and dismissal procedures provided for in the Employment Relations Act 2000;
- review employment law to ensure that it reflects the reality of workplace relations in small businesses; and
- ensure that advice and information is available to businesses to support them in hiring migrants to fill skill shortages.

United's primary aim is to get the unemployed into paid work. This seems to be a commonly held view for most of the Coalition parties.

These policies seem more in line with National's view, although with only one seat in the current make-up of the Coalition Government, United appears to have little influence.

MAORI PARTY

The Maori Party has three main employment goals for the Maori community:

- skills and qualifications for Maori;
- Maori participation in the labour market; and
- Maori privately and collectively owned business growth.

The Party also has wider goals for the employment sector. These include simplifying employment legislation, holding employers accountable for preventable workplace injuries and deaths and raising the minimum wage to at least \$15.00 an hour.

It will be interesting to see how this new National-Maori party relationship works in terms of agreeing in the area of Maori employment.

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CONCLUSION

Whether any of these parties will be able to implement any of these policies will depend on their various agreements with the National Party. Despite this, there is no doubt that all of the parties in the new Coalition Government have plans to make changes to the existing employment laws. Time will tell if they are able to push through their own agenda in the employment law area and to what extent.

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