

## Locked out SFWU workers say 'We Beat the boss!'

Contributed by Graham Day  
Tuesday, 24 July 2007

First ever national lockout in public hospitals ends in victory

After 10 days of being locked out 800 Service and Food Workers Union members representing ancillary staff in hospitals from Kaitaia to Invercargill, are celebrating their win in the Employment Court that deemed the lockout illegal by Spotless, an Australian based transnational. Bosses at Spotless were finally willing to sign the letter of intent guaranteeing the same negotiated terms and conditions as District Health Boards (DHB) and other contractors. Additionally, the union is going back to the Employment Court to argue for the 9 days of lost wages from the lock out.

This bitter dispute in the public health system comes on the back of growing militancy across the sector as a result of the fracturing, some years ago under the madness of 'Rogernomics', of the service and the creation of a two tier health service with some of the lowest paid workers being employed by private companies.

Spotless is by far the largest employer in the sector and were attempting to bargain outside of framework of a national pay settlement. Unsurprisingly, Spotless has paid amongst the lowest rates in the sector with many workers paid near the minimum wage of NZ\$11.25.

The new agreement will see pay rises of \$3 an hour for 3000 low paid workers. The lockout was spurious as the company tried to argue in the court that the workers were essential workers and must provide essential cover and demanded the union organise proper strikes not the effective rolling short sharp strikes leaving the bosses guessing when this 'guerrilla tactics' would kick in.

The public health system as never considered the ancillary staff as essential. Perhaps they would be paid more if this was the case! The Labour lead government after union lobbying has secured an additional \$16 million of funding to secure this pay deal. Whilst this was a welcome development, the government has ignored the real issue that of bringing back a fully funded public health service into the public sector and removing the parasitic private profiteers out. Thus ending a two tier system with the introduction of national collective bargaining and pay parity across New Zealand that delivers to the people an health service free at the point of use.

Militancy in the health service is increasing as laboratory workers, radiographers and junior doctors have all struck over pay and conditions. It is likely the senior doctors are going to have a successful ballot for industrial action over pay and conditions and the nurses are starting to negotiate over pay now.

Only a Labour government committed to a socialist health policy can deliver a truly free health service. The capitalist market delivers chaos, uncertainty and price to pay for good health care. One thing is for sure the scrooge of a company has taught the workers militancy pays!