

UNITE Files for Referendum on Minimum Wage

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Proposed Referendum Wording

"Should the minimum wage be raised to \$25 a hour and then in steps over the next three years until it reaches two-thirds of the average ordinary time hourly rate as recommended by the 1973 Royal Commission into Social Security"?

Unite

Union National Secretary Matt McCarten has submitted a request to the Clerk of the House for the right to petition for a referendum on raising the minimum wage to two-thirds of the average wage.

Unite

Union which represents many minimum wage workers says the recent 50-cent a hour increase, while welcome, is barely enough to cover the cost of living increase. "In real terms it is a cut for our members as the money they spend most of their incomes on are things like food, power, transport and housing which have risen much faster than the overall CPI", said Mike Treen Unite National Director.

"We

need steps to restore the minimum wage to the two-thirds of the average wage which was the level implemented after the 1973 Royal Commission on Social security. This is also the level recommended by the International Labour Organisation. If the minimum wage had stayed at that level it would be worth \$16 an hour in today's dollars. The fact that it was allowed to drop to one third of the average wage under National and has only got back to half the average under Labour is a legacy of the policies that have produced a low wage economy in New Zealand.

"We

believe the minimum wage should be increased by at least \$1 an hour each year until it reaches 2/3 of the average wage. These steps will increase purchasing power in the economy by directing help to those who need it most. The economic crisis facing the world is the toxic product of insatiable greed at the top and the free-market policies of governments that removed all controls. The end result is a skewing of income and wealth so that the rich got richer and the poor fell

off the edge.

Socialist

Appeal welcomes and supports this campaign to raise the minimum wage.

However,

such Citizens Initiated Referendum as this is not binding on the government, and no doubt if successful will fall on deaf ears.

It

is pleasing to note that other unions are getting behind the campaign. To be guaranteed of success the campaign must back it up, when necessary, with co-ordinated industrial action.

This

is a role for the CTU in organising such action. One thing is clear if the present leadership of the CTU is not up to the task ahead of them then the new layer of unionists who will become active in the next period will move to replace them with leaders that will.