

Stream Proposal: AIRAANZ 2020

Improving workers' rights – politics, social change and the workplace

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Within the context of continuing globalisation there has been an increase in social movements pushing for fundamental change. The #metoo movement has mobilised women worldwide; currently the Extinction Rebellion movement has stirred global activism across generations, and spurred action in response to environmental crisis. On the 'dark' side, globalisation has also fuelled outspoken and mainstreamed racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

New Zealand has been in the limelight due to landmark legal action such as the 2017 Pay Equity Settlement. This settlement dramatically increased wages for care and support workers in order to address historic gender pay discrimination (Douglas & Ravenswood, 2019). This is a seemingly divergent approach from other jurisdictions which have taken more laissez-faire attitudes towards addressing inequality and workers' rights. Indeed, New Zealand is again viewed by some as an antipodean paragon of social change (Ryan et al., 2014).

The landmark pay equity settlement timeframe overlays the same period as the global #metoo movement. It begs the question, how much does global and local, social and political change interact to achieve or spur positive change in a national context?

On the flipside, globalisation has resulted in a coalescing of attitudes against migrants among many Western countries. Barriers have been built, (physical, legal and political), to exclude the movement of people between countries. Migrant workers' rights are being slowly eroded, under the rhetoric of global labour markets (Wright, 2016); and workers' rights are often invisible in global supply chains (Kaine & Josserand, 2018). In New Zealand, several instances of exploitation and trafficking of migrants have recently been prosecuted at the same time that legal temporary visa rights have been weakened. Simultaneously, free trade agreements have extended the power of business and global supply chains to further encroach on national sovereignty to determine employment rights *and* environmental protections (eg the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement).

Given the general global concern regarding inequality, discrimination, and the environment, how much has employment regulation (formal and informal) changed to improve and protect workers' rights? What does the future for workers' rights and work look like?

This stream seeks papers that include approaches or topics such as:

- A socio-political approach to understand why and how changes have come about to improve workers' rights;

- How global and local social movements influence workers' rights, eg. Human trafficking, women, the global supply chain, 'minority' groups;
- Interrogate the global and local contexts to understand whose work conditions are improved and at what cost?
- Has social outrage around legal and illegal practices such as human trafficking and migrant exploitation, made inroads into employment protections?
- What traction have non-state attempts at regulating employment conditions achieved?
- What are unions' new roles in social and employment change, including green work and employment?

References

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- McGregor, J., & Davies, S. G. (2019). Achieving pay equity: Strategic mobilization for substantive equality in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26(5), 619–632. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12253>
- Wright, C. F. (2017). Employer Organizations and Labour Immigration Policy in Australia and the United Kingdom: The Power of Political Salience and Social Institutional Legacies. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 55(2), 347–371. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12216>