



Supermarket workers in New Zealand deserve a better deal. Every day, working people pop into their local New World, Countdown or Pak N Save to hand over their cash for the necessities of life. But for the folks getting up at 5am to make sure there is bread and milk on the shelves, sometimes their wages and conditions are so poor, they can barely stock their own cupboards.

Why has New Zealand accepted this daily vacuum of money out of the hands of working people?

Some supermarket owners have decided to compete by driving downwards the quality of life of the people who work for them. Their constant pressure on wages and conditions of employment has made large parts of the supermarket industry provide less than supermarket workers deserve, and take away money from our local communities.

There are retailers who would like to pay a better. But, with competitors paying the bare minimum, the pressure is always to pay less.

Retail is a big employer - employing over 200,000 New Zealanders. Despite the potential for anti-social shifts and insecure hours, the industry supports thousands of families. The average supermarket worker starts on

the minimum wage. This isn't enough to get by and participate fully in society - for full time work.

Despite this the supermarket industry has owner operator employers who are listed on the NBR Rich List. The worst operators can easily afford to pay people fairly without raising their prices.

While retail is a big first employer, for a large part of the workforce its much more: over 60% of retail workers FIRST Union surveyed see retail as their career. But the opportunity to actually build satisfying careers in retail is severely limited by poor conditions. The undercutting competition also limits the training and development potential good employers want to be able to invest in the Kiwis who work there.

We can fix this with a Fair Pay Agreement for supermarkets. This would set a fair minimum of pay, hours of work, training, and could address health and safety minimums as well. It would stop the race to the bottom that is raiding the pantries of supermarket workers. It will help good employers who want to compete on quality, ethics and innovation rather than wage exploitation. It will help people in your community just like Jay and Connor whose supermarket stories are overleaf.



**Connor
Cooke**

Supermarket Worker
Wellington

“With a few extra shifts it is enough, but it is really hard to save anything. And I never feel like we have much of a safety net.”

For more info contact Louisa Jones
FIRST union | 027 548 7004

Connor Cooke works in the produce department at a Wellington Countdown supermarket. He works a 7am to 4pm shift four days a week, but then tries to pick up 1-2 other shifts a week.

Twenty-three years old, he flats in north Wellington with his partner – who also works as supermarket checkout supervisor. He’s currently on \$18.20 an hour but would really love to be earning more.

“With a few extra shifts it is enough, but it is really hard to save anything. And I never feel like we have much of a safety net. If I ever didn’t have enough sick leave I could be in real trouble.”

Conor is saving to return to complete a philosophy degree at Victoria University.

Better pay is important to Connor, but so is adequate and sustainable staffing levels.

Connor’s supermarket is a reasonably large employer with over 50 workers. Connor feels lucky he has good shifts at reasonable times.

“It would be good if supermarkets could stop competing by making it harder for us. Maybe it would be good if there were some rules about staffing levels and some better standards like wages. And maybe if it was the same for everyone – in every supermarket – that’d help.”

“I moved from Australia to New Zealand in 2017 because my partner was a Kiwi. I got here in November and in December I started in stores at Countdown which is owned by Woolworths Australia. I’d worked for Woolworths Australia back home for more than a decade including as a Woolworths shop assistant for two or three years.

“The thing that struck me first is the difference in rates. Back in Aussie we’ve got a modern award and the starting rate in Aussie dollars is the same that a Duty Manager - in charge of a whole store - gets in New Zealand in Kiwi dollars.

“And that’s made worse by the cost of living here. On the Gold Coast I was renting a one bedroom apartment with a pool and a bit of a garden for more or less the same price I’m paying for a single room here. By the time you pay your rent and fill your car up, you’re broke.

“I’m pretty much on four dollars an hour less here than I was back home despite having a more senior position here so I do an extra seven hours to earn what I was earning back home.

That’s the industry rate here though, and it’s been set by the competition - their business model makes it a lot harder to get a pay rise. And pay’s lower in New Zealand than Aussie for pretty much every job. It doesn’t have to be like this though. If we could negotiate a minimum rate across the industry, like a living wage, there wouldn’t be any space for undercutting based on lower wages.

But in the meantime I’m honestly not looking seriously at staying in New Zealand, not unless some kind of miracle happens. I’m 33 and I want to get in some study and buy a house and I’m looking at my future. I don’t know how people get ahead here. It seems to me there’s no reason Kiwis should get paid less than Aussies apart from the way the system’s set up.



**Jay
Tinson**

**Supermarket Worker
Auckland**

“The starting rate
in Aussie dollars
is the same that a
Duty Manager -
in charge of a
whole store -
gets in New
Zealand in
Kiwi dollars.”

For more info contact Louisa Jones
FIRST union | 027 548 7004