

New Government moves quickly on workplace changes

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The Opening of Parliament this week in Wellington and the Speech from the Throne revealed an ambitious and ‘aspirational’ programme by the incoming Government. A number of changes are heralded for workplaces with a number of them to be in effect in 2018.

In general, the focus for the government is sustainable economic development, lifting wages and reducing inequality. Some of the key initiatives announced in the speech are:

1. The legislated minimum wage will increase to \$20 by 2020 with first step an increase to \$16.50 in 2018.
2. Increase in paid parental leave to 22 weeks in 2018 and 26 weeks in 2020 (already in the House under urgency).
3. Incentives for employers to take on apprentices.

Announcements to date from new Minister of Workplace Relations, Iain Lees-Galloway, but not included in the Speech from the Throne:

1. The Government will form a Joint Working group to replace the ‘Hobbit’ law ‘to develop a durable framework for workplace relations in the sector.’
2. The Employment (Pay Equity and Equal Pay) Bill, introduced early in 2017 under the last government, will not proceed and work will start on new legislation ‘that adheres to all the principles of the Joint Working Group on Pay Equity.’

There have been no announcements to date on the Domestic Violence – Victim’s Protection Bill, introduced by Jan Logie early last year, but it is expected to progress in the current term of government.

The Labour Policy to repeal the changes in the Employment Relations Act 2000 made by successive National coalition governments in the last 9 years is expected to also progress next year and possibly in the first 100 days if election campaign announcements can be believed.

Announcements on further changes to the ERA have yet to be made and are possibly not being considered as higher priority as the Pay Equity legislation, but it is likely that there will be a number of changes to legislation governing workplaces in the next three years.

Gordon Anderson’s article in this edition of CLEW’d In discusses further the changes to the ERA.