

Timeline of significant work stoppages 1970s/1980s ALL OUT STRIKE SEMINAR BACKGROUND INFO SHEET

Major cross-union stoppages or stoppages which attracted widespread national support are CAPITALISED

1967-68 RECESSION, END OF LONG ECONOMIC BOOM/‘GOLDEN WEATHER’

- 1968 STRIKES OVERTURN ARBITRATION COURT’S NIL WAGE ORDER
 - Wellington Trades Council regional general strike

1969-73 WAGE EXPLOSION, STRIKES WIN MAJOR WAGE INCREASES & BETTER CONDITIONS, ERA OF WAGE CONTROLS BEGINS IN RESPONSE

- 1969 Successful seven-week sparkies’ strike sparks strike surge, then posties go slow, 1971 meatworkers’ national go-slow 6 weeks
- 1971 era of wage controls begins (lasts until 1984, on and off)
 - 1971 STRIKES DESTABLISE STABILISATION OF REMUNERATION ACT

1969-71 RESTRUCTURING PART 1: SEA TRANSPORT AUTOMATION, CONTAINERS

- 1969-70 Wainui strike/Seamen’s roster dispute 141 days, 1971 govt. deregisters Seamen’s Union after strike, Wharfies strikes over containers 1971

1973 OIL SHOCK, 1973-74 STRIKE WAVE, ECONOMIC DOWNTURN 1974-75

- 1973, 3 month Auckland boilermakers’ strike at Steel Construction sparks 1973-74 strike wave and partial wage freeze by Labour govt.
- First strike over factory closure – Ngauranga meatworks redundancy dispute 1974
- 1974 AUCKLAND WAIHEKE FERRY INJUNCTION DISPUTE: Unofficial Auckland general strike, official Wellington and Canterbury general strikes over right to strike and jailing of Bill Andersen, Northern Drivers’ Union

1976-77 WAGE FREEZE, ERA OF CONFRONTATION vs MULDOONISM

- 1976 NATIONAL STRIKE CAMPAIGN BREAKS WAGE FREEZE – many rolling strikes, Wellington and Hawkes Bay regional strikes
- Power cuts by power station workers leads to govt threat to de-recognise PSA 1976
- Repressive legislation: National Government 1975-84 (Muldoon PM) issues over 20 acts/orders to clamp down on union power, wages, and strikes
 - E.g. Wellington Boilermakers’ Union deregistered 1976

1976-78 POLITICAL STOPPAGES

- 1976 Wellington port workers anti-nuclear strike vs USS Truxtun visit, 1977 Wellington Trades Council general strike vs increased powers of spies (SIS), Green ban on construction work at Takaparawhau | Bastion Point, 1977-78.

1978-80 RESTRUCTURING PART 2 – second oil shock 1979, beginnings of mass unemployment, but some successful fightbacks

- Mangere bridge lockout 1978-1980 over redundancy (857 days – then longest NZ stoppage), Lyttelton tunnel workers’ redundancy picket 1979, strike forces Southdown meatworks to temporarily reopen after closure 1980, Huntly power station 10 week strike reverses mass layoffs 1980; series of Wellington car assembly stoppages 1978 onwards vs redundancies

1979-80 UNIONS SUCCESSFULLY DEFEND LIVING STANDARDS AGAINST WAGE CONTROLS, HISTORIC PEAK IN STRIKES (in terms of workers involved)

- 1979 Wellington and Canterbury general strikes over living standards (May 1979)
- 1979 NATIONAL GENERAL STRIKE – one day strike by over 340,000 workers (September). Historic strike: largest in country’s history, FOL, PSA, and Posties take part, hence solidarity between blue and white collar unions.
- 1980 KINLEITH PAPER MILL STRIKE 3 months – Kinleith workers take on the largest company in NZ followed by the government and win.

- Leads to repeal of Remuneration Act in 1980.

1981 ARRESTS OF PICKETERS AND CONSERVATIVE COUNTER-MOBILISATION

- 1981 33 striking Dunedin fertiliser workers arrested for picketing
- 1981 AUCKLAND AIRPORT PICKETING DISPUTE: 48 striking Auckland airport engineers and supporters arrested for picketing, Auckland and Wellington general strikes, but major defeat. 'Kiwis care' anti-strike march, Auckland.

1981-84 RESTRUCTURING PART 3 – automation, computerisation, and de-industrialisation, 1982-83 recession

- 1981 RIXEN CLOTHING FACTORY OCCUPATION, LEVIN 1981 over redundancy, 3 months – longest workplace occupation in NZ history
- 1982 NZ Meat Workers' Union national redundancy strike for Gear/Petone meatworkers. Islington meatworks lockout 1983 (almost 4 months)

1982-84 WAGE FREEZE AND REPRESSION

- 1982 FOL/Combined State Unions campaign against cuts in living standards, 36 rallies nationwide, giant rally in Auckland.
- 1983-84 FOL NATIONAL STRIKE CAMPAIGNS FAIL TO BREAK THE WAGE FREEZE. Anti-freeze strikes generally led by unions of lower-paid – eg. strikes by cleaners (BP House Wellington 24 hour pickets, multi-million dollar strikebreaking), storepersons and packers, Union Carbide workers. Murder of Ernie Abbott.
- 1984 entire Marsden Point construction site workforce of 2000 sacked twice for stoppages, return to work legislation, riot police protect strikebreakers.

1984 NEOLIBERAL ERA BEGINS & 1985-86 STRIKE WAVE (biggest in NZ history in terms of working days not worked)

- End of compulsory arbitration 1984, end of wage controls, 'free market' policies.
- 1985-86 strike wave: part 1. Strikes about restructuring
 - 1986 national meatworkers' strike, 6-8 weeks, biggest conflict since 1951 in terms of working days not worked (also a strike to regain lost wages)
 - Series of lockouts to impose job & wage cuts & assert 'right to manage' – eg. Tasman paper mill in Kawerau (3 months), Glenbrook steel mill, Ford Wiri plant Longburn meatworks 1986-89
- 1985-86 strike wave: part 2. Strikes about regaining lost wages during the freeze
 - Lower paid, public sector strikes – clerical workers, bank workers, teachers, hotel, hospital, and restaurant workers, Sheraton hotel sit-in 1985 (40 arrests), PSA wool testers laboratory workers' strike 1986-87, 143 days...
- Historic pay equity strike at Wellington motor assembly plants 1986.

RESTRUCTURING PART 4: ROBBER BARON ERA, CORPORATISATION & PRIVATISATION 1986-1990

- Avalanche of factory closures, layoffs, wage cuts; increased shift work, casualisation
 - Employer repression of militancy: many lockouts achieve restructuring by force; wave of multi-million damages claims vs strikes 1986-87
- Labour Relations Act 1987 partially dismantles arbitration system by largely preventing localised above award agreements, so such disputes decline
- Nissan way strike 1988
- Public sector restructuring – railways, forestry, ports, public service depts, postal service, city councils, education, health...
 - 1988 PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS' NATIONAL STRIKE vs STATE SECTOR BILL 1988 – 2nd largest govt. workers' strike after Oct. 2025 mega strike?

Aftermath: 1991 Employment Contracts Act and long-term decline in strikes 1990s-2017 (see overleaf for graphs)

STRIKE STATISTICS

