

The Magazine

Winter 2024

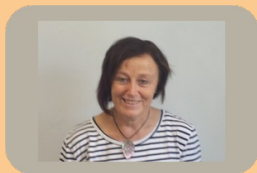
Irons in the fire - The
Government's economic
changes and the Public
Service.

nupe

*national union of
public employees*

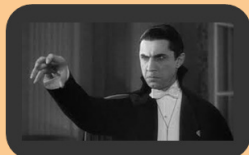
co-operation without compromise

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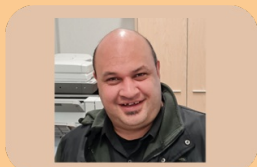
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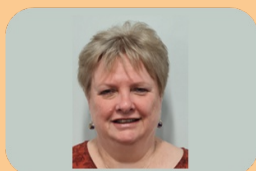
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Secretary's Notes

Kia Ora Everyone,

Winter is here, freezing cold starts and frost at least here in Christchurch – but sunny days to follow so that is good. I hope you are all doing ok and keeping warm and well. We are very aware there are a lot of flu type bugs circulating.



We are very aware and also very busy as we confront significant change resulting from some clear direction change with this new government. NUPE is not politically affiliated and we will continue to push for the safety and terms and conditions with this government as we have previously.

I want to acknowledge some special members and staff.

Firstly, congratulations to Quentin who has been at NUPE for 10 years (this time around) Quentin also did some work for NUPE prior to this stint. We are fortunate to have Quentin in our team. Quentin is passionate for members to be treated fairly and with respect, he brings with him considerable knowledge of the history of unions having completed a Doctor of Philosophy in New Zealand Labour history therefore Quentin is actually Dr Quentin. Quentin is responsible for the delegate training and courses as well as his specific membership areas. Quentin will get an additional 2 weeks leave this year as a result of completing 10 years with NUPE and I understand he may head away to Australia for at least part of this. Thanks, Quentin, for all the time and effort you put into your role here at NUPE. Have a great holiday you deserve it.

I also want to acknowledge some NUPE members who have sadly passed away recently after being loyal NUPE members for a long time. Lin Entwistle and Naomi Aati both FGC Coordinators with OT have passed away this year. We loved their passion and commitment to their work their colleagues and to NUPE.

"He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata. Mihi aroha ki a koru akua haere, moemoera I raro i te kakahu aroha o te atua."

NUPE is also now seeing some of our long-time members retire and we want to wish them all a wonderful retirement of good health and relaxation.

I am continually reminded that the purpose of NUPE is you, our membership, your safety terms, and conditions. We do try and work hard to stay connected with you and to be accessible to you.

Part of this accessibility has been setting up the NUPE App, please download this so you have it and please use this to contact and also to update your personal details e.g address etc. We also now have a NUPE membership application form available on our website at www.nupe.org.nz

Ngā mihi nui

Janice Gemmell
Secretary/Manager
National Union of Public Employees

Obituary

Ivan Finlayson (NUPE Secretary and Organiser 1998 - 2002)



NUPE received some sad news recently that Ivan Finlayson, who was the second Secretary of NUPE (1997 - 2002), has passed away. Ivan became Secretary after Geoff Pierce, the foundation secretary, resigned and later passed away due to illness.

Ivan had a long involvement in the Union movement and politically. He was active in the Labour party, and later the NewLabour party and the Alliance. He played a pivotal role in the local FOL/CTU, especially in the fight against the Employment Contracts Act in 1991. Prior to coming to NUPE, he was a long serving PSA member.

He was NUPE Secretary at a time when the union was expanding its membership and attracted new groups outside of the CDHB. The union was involved in a number of disputes between it, employers, and the Government. The most notable being the 'Goneburger' dispute and the Vet dispute that involved the then Labour government. Ivan remained in touch with NUPE after his retirement and was always ready to offer advice and support when necessary.

*"Warm summer sun,
Shine kindly here,
Warm southern wind,
Blow softly here.
Green sod above,
Lie light, lie light.
Good night, dear heart,
Good night, good night."
Warm Summer Sun - Mark Twain.*



Local Canterbury Council of Trade Unions (CTU) march against the Employment Relations Bill (unknown date either 1991 or 1992).

Ivan Finlayson (front right). Ivan is holding the CTU banner at the front of the march)

Ken Douglas (CTU Secretary) is leading the march along with (PSA Regional Secretary), John McKenzie, who is beside him.

(Photo from Christchurch Press).

Pay Equity Claims

NUPE is involved in several of these claims – The administration claim, the Corrections claim, and the care and support workers claim. The progress of the claims is a mixed bag and they have been changes in the pay equity area which have affected the claims. This includes the change of the change of Government and a changing of priorities. These claims affect the lowest paid of our workforce and helped to correct the rather substantial pay imbalance that exists in these areas.



The Pay Equity Task force

The taskforce was created by the previous Government to ensure that claims proceeded swiftly through the process (which can be cumbersome) by providing advice and guidance and work through any substantial issues that might arise. The Taskforce's work was to coordinate and drive this work, supporting agencies to implement the Action Plan and progress pay equity.

The Action Plan helped reduce the Public Service gender pay gap from 12.2% in 2018 to 7.7% in 2022. This drop represents the most significant progress since measurement of the Public Service gender pay gap began in 2000. Pay equity claim settlements during the same period contributed significantly to this drop in the gender pay gap, and the proportion of women in leadership grew to over 50%, for the first time. [1]

In May, the Government announced that the taskforce would be abolished. This effectively means that there will be no guidance for remaining pay equity claims as of 30 June (when the funding for the taskforce expires). Essentially, there will be no further guidance for parties who will be expected to navigate the process by themselves.

Care and Support Claim

This is the oldest of the Pay Equity claims. The original claims were settled in 2017/2018, after a Court case and intervention by the then Government. On 19 June 2018, the Government announced a settlement with unions and employers to extend the 2017 Care and Support Workers (Pay Equity) Settlement Act to 5,000 mental health and addiction support workers.

Most of NUPE's NGO membership was/is covered by this settlement.

The original Care and Support settlements expired several years ago and was extended by the Government before lapsing in 2022. As people may be aware there were discussions at that time involving the Unions, the employers and the Government to increase the rates of pay that had been put in place by the settlement. Both the Unions and the employers believed there needed to be substantial increases to help with both recruitment and retention. This was opposed by the then Ministry of Health and the then Minister, who finally offered a 30-cent rise after discussion.

Currently, the Care and Support Pay equity claim is before the Court and unions are seeking a resolution of the claim there.

Administration Claim

The Administration claim, which covered 40 public sector agencies, has been unceremoniously halted by the Public Service Commission. This came as a huge surprise to the Unions involved, which included NUPE. Prior to this occurring there had been issues with the interview process, which had led to several interviews being redone. The unions are considering their options in this matter.

Corrections Pay Equity Claim

The Corrections Pay Equity claim is still underway. Because it remains an active claim it is covered by confidentiality between the parties. However, there is a desire to wrap this matter up as soon as possible and move toward bargaining. (As of the publication of this magazine, NUPE is confident of the progress of this claim).

Community Social Work Pay Equity Claim



The Community Social Work pay equity claim was settled earlier this year and covers all publicly funded social workers in the community sector i.e. those social workers who are employed by an NGO and receive public funding. This claim will correct the imbalance between those Social Workers employed directly within the public sector and their community-based counterparts who undertake the same tasks and have the same responsibilities but receive less pay.

We are aware that a number of NGOs have been examining the roles and responsibilities of their staff and whether they fit within its coverage and are eligible for the new rates of pay. This remains a matter of contention in some agencies.

For further details: <https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/system/public-service-people/pay-gaps-and-pay-equity/extension-of-pay-equity>

[1] <https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/system/public-service-people/pay-gaps-and-pay-equity/dedicated-taskforce-leading-action-to-reduce-gender-inequity>

The Government's Red-Hot Heat of Change

The Political and Economic Situation

Prior to the 2023 election, there had already been announcements from political parties that they were looking at imposing cuts within the public service. In the aftermath of the 2023 budget, the Labour Government indicated that it would be seeking cutbacks as part of its move to decrease the Government's spending, which had dramatically increased as a result of COVID. After the 2023 General Election, the parties of the incoming Government (National, ACT, and NZ First) made no secret of their intention to cut the size of the public sector and the number of people it employed. ACT, in particular, was very open about seeing the size of the public sector as a problem and argued that it needed to be cut back to its 2017 levels. Although it was accepted that it was unrealistic to cut back to 2017 levels, the incoming Government did commit to a dramatic restructuring of the sector, particularly in 'backroom' positions.

Early in 2024, Nicola Wills, the new Minister of Finance, asked the public sector and crown agencies to cut funding by 6.5-7.5% over the coming financial year. The current number of public sector roles that have been cut (including vacant positions) stands at approximately 6,400. Most departments have attempted to limit the number of redundancies by not filling vacant positions or amalgamating positions. However, despite these efforts, there are significant job losses. The Government has not ruled out future redundancies in the public sector, so this may not be the last time public sector staff will be put under the economic microscope.

What might this mean?

The Government's argument for cuts is that a number of roles are backroom and unnecessary. This is a disputed position. NUPE's belief is that there needed to be more and longer consultation around changes, which has not occurred. We are also very doubtful about the economic and work benefits of eliminating and condensing roles. Roles that are made redundant have responsibilities and duties that still need to be undertaken. These are then undertaken by remaining staff who are forced to manage their own roles and responsibilities in addition to those of others. We believe that there is a real risk of poorer service as a consequence of role reduction.

NUPE's Response

NUPE has participated in the restructuring process of a number of organisations caught up in the Government's directives. Mostly, these have involved agencies attempting to deliver services with less staff and resources. NUPE's concern is that cuts in one section of an organisation often lead to a decline in services elsewhere. The most obvious example is the cuts to

National/Act Policies on Public Sector Reform



- Deliver savings in public sector spending by reducing non-essential back office functions, with expenditure reduction targets to be set for each agency, informed by the increase in back office head count at that agency since 2017.
- When evaluating government expenditure, it should be assessed on the extent to which it is delivering public goods, social insurance, regulating market failure and political choice.

(from National/Act Coalition Agreement 2023. https://www.nzdoctor.co.nz/sites/default/files/2023-11/National_ACT_Agreement.pdf).

supposed 'backroom' sections in OT, which have meant that other staff are being forced to undertake their work.

NUPE's other worry has been the manner in which these changes have been rushed through without adequate consultation or feedback. Given the size and scope of the cuts, we would have expected far more thorough consultation. NUPE is aware that some restructurings have been legally challenged. This is because the manner in which employers have made changes resulting in job losses is not in line with the provisions of the relevant Collective Employment Agreements. NUPE supports moves that allow for more consultation and ensure that employers adhere to the employment provisions in their agreements.

CTU Response to Budget 2024

The NZCTU has analysed the health spending at Budget 24 in conjunction with ASMS and NZNO. Health funding was central during the election campaign. All major political parties stated that they would increase health funding every year.



“This Government has added \$93 million to health operating expenditure for the 2024/25 fiscal year on a net basis. This appears to be much less than the \$2 billion of new operating expenditure claimed in the Budget. Much of that is not new money, it's simply recycled expenditure. When adjusted for inflation, total operating expenditure fell by \$775 million or nearly 3%,” said Craig Renney, NZCTU Economist and Director of Policy.

“With population growth, this figure becomes even more troubling. Per capita operational expenditure on health fell by 1.3%, and real per capita expenditure (i.e., adjusted for inflation) fell by 4.5% on current population projections.

“Many election promises were not delivered in Budget 2024, including:

- 13 new cancer drugs
- 50 additional doctors per year
- More nurses and midwives
- Funding a new medical school

“As an example of the priorities within government, Budget 2024 commits more new money to funding security guards for A&E departments than to training new medical staff. We would question whether hospitals would need so much security if patients were being seen more quickly by doctors.

“This Budget doesn't appear to have addressed any of the key workforce shortages in any meaningful way. This is likely to increase stress levels across the workforce and encourage more trained medical staff to move overseas.

“Budget 2025 will present another opportunity to address the shortages being generated by this Budget. The Coalition Government needs to take that opportunity to invest properly in health services and health workforces,” said Renney.

NGO Update



NUPE members that work in the NGO sector carry out fantastic work on a 24/7 basis with some of the most vulnerable clients in our society, unfortunately the work is undervalued and underpaid. These members support the most vulnerable members of the community.

NUPE absolutely values our members and the work they do on a daily basis. We remain hopeful that the new pay equity claim which effectively covers the whole sector will deliver improvements to the workforce in this sector, as we know this will take time. Sometimes members are faced with situations in the workplace that are uncertain and unsafe (without the appropriate resources and processes to support them).

Earlier in the year NUPE undertook a safety survey across all membership groups in the NGO sector, the purpose of the survey was to identify key risks in these services in the NGO sector. This project was initiated by increasing reports from members across organisations of high-risk incidents and assaults on staff.

NUPE has been analysing the data received and this has resulted with us following up with a number of submitters to gather more detail and information. We have contacted employers in the sector to gather policy and procedural information also.

As a result of the survey, we have discovered some common themes and concerns including:

- High risk clients being admitted to some services that are not able to be safely managed within the resources available to staff
- There are varied health and safety policies between organisations with a varied level of training and orientation on these policies for staff
- There appears to be limited support at times from police in the highest risk scenarios

We have discovered that in some services there is ongoing, acute and unacceptable risk, some staff are being assaulted and injured.

We are now working on a number of key action points that will be raised to management of each respective organisation as part of our ongoing union / management meetings where we advocate for our members.

For NUPE your safety in the workplace is our priority.

In August we enter into bargaining to re-negotiate the Collective Agreements for members working at Brackenridge and Stepping Stone Trust. The focus is to enhance/introduce key conditions in these agreements off the back of recent claims meetings held with members and the electronic claims surveys.

NUPE is committed to remaining accessible and responsive to members - we have seen positive membership growth across the sector in recent months.

We aim to keep membership fees in the NGO sector affordable.

A shout out to our delegates across the different groups, thank you for the work you do, we couldn't function as a union without dedicated delegates!

We are always on the look out for new delegates willing to step up and support fellow NUPE members in the workplace, the union provides training and support for delegates.

If you are passionate about advocacy and working to enact positive change in the workplace please make contact with us.

Luke Stenton
Organiser

Being Sick – The changing nature of sick Leave

The days of illness are once again upon the country as winter strikes, bringing with it the usual flu and cold. As a result, the issue of sick leave has once again become a prominent topic of discussion in workplaces and during bargaining. Since 2020, there has been a noticeable change in the amount of sick leave taken due to the advent of COVID. Sick leave attendance levels have certainly not returned to pre-2020 levels.

The most common reasons for taking sick leave remain those of personal sickness or taking sick/domestic leave because an immediate family member is sick, and you have to care for them. However, additional issues have also increased including the increasing use of sick leave to cope with increasing workplace stress.

This article largely summarises the Workplace Wellness Report 2023 which received 137 responses from organisations in both the public and private sectors. Responding organizations totalled 135,742 people, including 114,104 permanent workers. (copies of the report are available from the website: <https://businessnz.org.nz/workplace-wellness-reports/>). It covers both public and private sectors.

What are people legitimately using sick leave for?

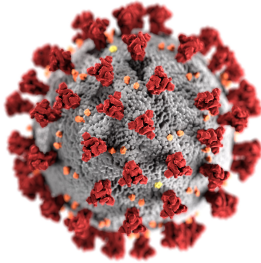
The main uses of sick leave are still personal illness and family care. Followed by people looking after themselves or others suffering from COVID, suffering from a personal injury and leave for stress and mental wellbeing.

Although, tales about of people misusing sick leave (the “sickie”) tend to be widespread, the last public sector survey of sick leave showed that people tended to use their sick leave when they were genuinely sick. The 2023 Report showed that although the incidents of people using sick leave as an entitlement had increased, it was a small rise and well down compared to the legitimate uses of sick leave.

In those instances of people who genuinely misuse sick leave, employers already have suitable provisions in the law and under employment agreements that they can use. These include meetings with the person concerned, seeking medical reports and, finally, the use of disciplinary processes.

The Introduction and demise of COVID Leave

COVID is still a presence in our communities. Although, the public sector has dropped the COVID mandates, there is still a recommendation to stay at home if you contract COVID for 5 days.



If you test positive for COVID-19, it is recommended you isolate for at least 5 days, even if you only have mild symptoms. This is to prevent spreading COVID-19 to other people. You would start your isolation at Day 0 — this is the day your symptoms started or when you tested positive, whichever came first.

Isolation means not leaving your house and not going to work or school. It also means staying away from others in your household as much as possible.

While most people recover from COVID, a number of people still exhibit symptoms after 2 weeks and even after 12 weeks. This is known as Long Covid and can have debilitating ongoing effects on people. Unfortunately, there remains no specific treatment or cure for Long Covid other than looking after yourself and making sure that you keep up your vaccinations. For the past several years, COVID had its own special leave- COVID leave – which provided income for those people who had to isolate due to contracting COVID. However, this has been rolled back with people now being expected to use their own sick leave if they contract COVID and other illnesses.

Since COVID in 2020, sick leave use has increased overall. In the 2023 Workplace Wellness Report, the increased use of sick leave as a result of COVID was acknowledged by the Report writers. Most people were taking leave due to the impact of COVID on themselves or on members of their families.

Workload the leading form of stress in the Workplace

One of the significant uses of sick leave has been for stress. Over the past decade more and more people have been subjected to stressful environments and work, and the figures quoted in reports reflect this new reality. Stressful work additionally tends to be more common as the size of the organisation increases. Large organisations have a higher proportion of stressed employees.

Stress can lead to weakened immune systems and physical illnesses.

One of the principle causes of stress has been the increase in workload. The increase has been so significant that workload is now the leading cause of stress in the workplace. Simply, workers are expected to, and are, undertaking more tasks and responsibilities than they were previously. This includes those tasks that originally were outside their duties and responsibilities. This is occurring as employers increasing combine roles to cover costs, reduce numbers, or to increase productivity (or all three).

The most significant increases in workload have been in the public sector, where staff increasing cope with decreased funding and increased responsibilities. The Global

Government Forum surveyed a number of public servants and concluded that workload was ensuring that leave provisions in Collective Agreements are maintained and strengthened



indeed increasing, and workers were increasingly feeling the pressure as a result. Asked if their workload had increased “significantly since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic” in 2020, over half of respondents (56%) said they agreed or strongly agreed. This feeling is most strongly felt in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, while a majority agree workloads are increasing in the United States, Mexico, Italy, and Canada, with the only exceptions being Spain and Germany – although even in both of those cases, more people agreed than disagreed that their workloads have gone up.

What can be done?

The most important thing is to ensure that if you feel sick then don't come to work and you don't encourage others to come to work. Sick workers can infect their colleagues and spread illness very quickly. However, to do so workers require adequate sick leave. The removal of special COVID leave actually reduces the total number of days available for sickness to people and increases the risk of sick people coming into the workplace.

Unions have an important role to play in ensuring that people receive their required and necessary leave to recuperate from illness and they are able to return to work. This includes

and that employers follow the existing rules and regulations in relation to sick leave. Currently, most organisations with over 20 employees are required to have health and safety committees to monitor health and safety risks and hazards in the workplace. These are required to be independent from the employer and reps should be trained in the use and provisions of the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, and their role in ensuring that health and safety is followed at work.

In the case of workload and its effects on stress, while there a number of conversations happening with employers, there needs to be a constant watch on this matter and people's roles and responsibilities. If people feel that their role has increased to the extent that it is overwhelming and greater than previously, they need to get in touch with their Union for help, advice and support. NUPE can advise and represent as well as undertake filing health and safety reports etc.

Don't be one of the herd...



Join a union that works for you

NUPE was formed in 1992 as an alternative public sector union. It is based in Christchurch.

NUPE has members in public sector agencies, ministries and departments from Auckland to Invercargill.

NUPE also represents members in a variety of health and community agencies including Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs).



- NUPE believes that only by standing together will workers be able to protect and improve their rights and conditions.
- NUPE is a democratic union which encourages the participation of members in decision making which affects them. Major decisions that may affect your job and conditions of employment are made only with your consent
- Being a smaller union means that NUPE members have direct communication and involvement with their Organiser.

**Join
NUPE
today**

National Union of Public Employees

Email: officeadmin@nupe.org.nz or www.nupe.org.nz



NZCTU condemns contractor reform as fundamental attack on workers' rights

(NZCTU Media Release)

June 25, 2024

Brooke van Velden's attempt to block contractors from challenging their employment status in the courts represents the biggest attack on workers' rights since the early 1990s and would open the floodgates to worker exploitation across Aotearoa.



NZCTU Te Kauae Kaimahi President Richard Wagstaff is condemning a proposed change to employment law as a deplorable attack on workers' rights.

Minister for Workplace Relations, Brooke van Velden, has instructed her officials to begin work on preventing workers misclassified as contractors from challenging their employment status in the courts.

"The Minister is consulting on removing fundamental employee rights, such as a minimum wage, annual leave, rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. That she even considers these changes worthy of consultation is deplorable," said Wagstaff.

"If implemented, these changes represent the biggest attack on workers' rights since the early 1990s and would open the floodgates to worker exploitation across Aotearoa New Zealand.

"Blocking workers from challenging their employment status in court will allow unscrupulous employers to circumvent employment law by hiring people as contractors, without fear of challenge.

"This could completely change the nature of employment. Workers in industries that currently seem safe from being engaged as contractors, would be at risk if these changes go through.

"The Minister wants to block vulnerable workers from even being able to have their case heard. This is not only unethical, but also legally unworkable.

"The NZCTU totally oppose any attempt by government to undermine access to justice for working people. Everyone, regardless of employment status, deserves good work – work that is well-paid, safe and secure and contributes to a meaningful and fulfilling life," said Wagstaff.

Inflation data shows cost-of-living challenges continue

(NZCTU Media Release)

17 July 2024



Data released by Statistics New Zealand today shows that annual inflation was 3.3%, falling from by nearly half from a year ago (6% – June 2023).

"This fall in inflation is welcome, but it is being driven by international factors rather than domestic actions. There are also costs for working people that continue to increase rapidly," said NZCTU Economist Craig Renney.

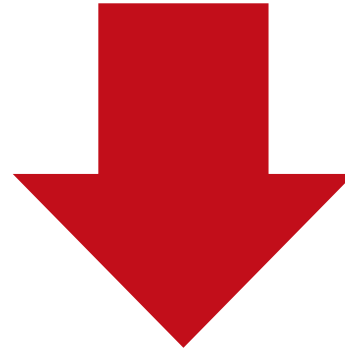


This data is also weaker than expected – suggesting problems within the wider economy. It supports other data which implies that we might be heading back into falls in economic output.

“The falls in inflation were driven by reductions in the price of food, particularly fruit and vegetables. There are also falls in the price of furniture, household appliances, and the cost of second-hand vehicles. This data suggests a lack of demand in the economy and a lack of consumer confidence. There were also falls in IT equipment and international airfares – again suggesting that demand for these discretionary goods may be falling.

“Meanwhile, pricing for rents continues to increase rapidly – rising 4.8% annually. This is the fastest rate of growth for 17 years, which is as far back as the data goes. Local Authority Rates increased 9.8%. Insurance prices increased 14% annually, led by growth in property insurance (24%) and car insurance (24%). Petrol prices rose 14.7%. These are costs that are very difficult to avoid, and so will be hitting working people in their pocket.

“This data will be welcomed by those looking for interest rates to fall. But they also suggest that economic growth is stalling, and that action is needed now to support employment and household incomes. The cuts in investment set out by the Government at the recent Budget are likely to exacerbate this problem even further,” said Renney.



NUPE App Download Steps



Step 1. Play/App Store

On your mobile device go to the app store (IOS) or Google play store (Android) and search for “NUPE.”



Step 2. Download



After Selecting the app from your devices store select the “Download” option and wait until the installation is complete.

Step 3. Launch

Once your app has been downloaded proceed to launch the app from your home screen, you will be greeted with some options.



Step 4. Register



The options you have will be to either “Sign up” or “Log in” Select the “Sign up” option and enter your email/password.

Step 5. Wait

After entering your details you will not be able to access the app until our team accepts you but after a few days maximum you will have complete access to the NUPE App.



nupe.org.nz

If You have any questions or concerns email noahnupe@gmail.com

JOIN NOW



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1

You can join online at www.nupe.org.nz or use the QR code below.

2

Download the NUPE App on the Google Play Store or Apple Store (use the QR codes below. Join, update details, stay informed.

3

Upon receiving your application, NUPE will process this, notify your employer to commence deductions and send you a confirmation and membership pack



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