

New Zealand fire agency proposes real pay cut for striking firefighters

Our reporter
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Firefighters and support staff across New Zealand participated in their 71st hour-long strike since October 2025 last Friday, amid the campaign for the country's national election on November 7.

Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) announced earlier this month it is offering firefighters a 2.2 percent pay increase, well below the rate of inflation and amounting to a real pay cut. FENZ's offer does not include backpay, and firefighters have been working on an expired contract for over two years, last receiving a pay rise in 2023.

FENZ has previously offered a 6.2 percent pay rise over three years. The annual inflation rate is currently 3.7 percent and expected to rise.

The offer is presented to workers who belong to the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU). A slightly higher, backdated offer of 2.4 percent has been made to non-union staff, including managers—a deliberate attempt to punish union membership and industrial action and to pit workers against each other.

The latest offer does not address firefighters' demands for better staffing, less reliance on volunteers, and upgrades to the fire truck fleet. At least a quarter of New Zealand's fire trucks are over 25 years old.

Socialist Equality Group (SEG) members spoke to some of those on strike at Avalon Fire Station in Lower Hutt about their working conditions and demands. The SEG's Tom Petterson is standing as a candidate in the Hutt South electorate for the November 7 election.

A firefighter with 39 years' experience said that the number of firefighters in the country had not kept up with the growth of the population. He added that fire trucks were not being regularly replaced. The main truck at Avalon was 23 years old with no talk about whether it will be replaced.

Another firefighter, who has been in the job for 10 years, said: "Our fire trucks are breaking down, we've only just started getting so-called 'new' fire trucks, but they've been in the country more than seven years now. Before that we haven't had a new fire truck since 2018."

Regarding the latest pay offer, he said, "We've been working on an expired contract for over two years now, and we've been doing these one-hour strikes for just over a year. After all that, they've come up with an offer that is just insulting. At the same time, the FENZ board is getting a 79 percent pay increase."

On the same day as the strike, Kerry Gregory resigned as FENZ chief executive. He had reportedly been on a salary of over half a million dollars. Seven deputy executives of FENZ collectively rake in almost \$2.5 million per year while trainee and graduate firefighters earn less than \$29.90 per hour—not much more than the \$23.95 minimum wage.

The firefighter added that the Hutt City Fire Station, which has been closed for five years following the discovery of black mould, "used to cover Hutt Central, most of Petone and the western hills. If there's a fire up on the Maungaraki Hill, the first truck that gets there is from Seaview [roughly 4-5 kilometres away]. I've been to a fire up there once, it took us 11 minutes to get from Seaview and by the time we got there the house was pretty much toast." The official target for firefighters to arrive at a fire is under 8 minutes.

The firefighter said there had been "business cases" about reopening the Hutt City Station but "we haven't heard anything" about when this might happen.

A third worker said there was a lot of public support for firefighters, as seen in the 53,000 signatures on a petition presented to parliament calling for an independent inquiry into FENZ, but this had not led to

any action. “Emergency services don’t seem to be valued. Our personal circumstances aside, we are doing this for the betterment of the public. Enough is enough, you’ve got to take a stand at some point.”

FENZ is funded almost entirely through levies on property and vehicle insurance. In 2024–25, the revenue generated from such levies was \$796 million, and it is budgeted to raise \$904 million in 2026–27. That is an almost 14 percent increase, or over 6.6 percent per year, three times the pay offer to firefighters.

What is required is not a reshuffling of this regressive levy, but a vast increase in funding for equipment and wages. The money exists to do this, but is concentrated in the fortunes of the billionaires and business executives.

The National Party—which leads the current coalition government—is feigning anger at “mismanagement” by FENZ, but it has ruled out any extra funding for fire and emergency services. The opposition Labour Party and the Greens have merely stated they will “review” FENZ funding, with no commitment to an increase in such funding.

The NZPFU is using the strategy of hour-long weekly strikes as a tool to wear down workers, while promoting illusions that the current government, or the next one, can be persuaded to change course through petitions and appeals to parliament. The NZ Council of Trade Unions (to which NZPFU is affiliated) is campaigning for a Labour-led government, promising that this will assist workers.

This is a fraud. The bureaucracy’s aim is to contain working-class anger and militancy, and prevent it from escalating out of the control of the union bureaucracy.

The firefighters’ strike is part of escalating industrial action in New Zealand against below-inflation wage offers and deteriorating conditions. On October 21, 8,000 university and polytechnic staff went on strike across the country. Last month, 10,000 workers at different government departments took strike action. In every case the unions are seeking to limit action as much as possible, keeping workers divided and promoting illusions in Labour, which shares National’s agenda of austerity and militarism.

Tom Petterson, the SEG candidate for Hutt South, stated during the most recent strike: “The only way for workers to fight back against austerity is to build new

organisations that they control: rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions and all the capitalist parties. These committees must link workers across industries and internationally in a powerful struggle based on a socialist perspective.”

The SEG’s election statement includes demands for an immediate 20 percent pay increase for all workers, and billions of dollars for public services. This must include a massive expansion of fire and emergency services, funded by expropriating the banks and major industries, and placing them under the democratic control of the working class.

The SEG urges firefighters and all workers, students and youth to attend our public election meeting on November 1 at 1:30 p.m., at the Dowse Art Museum in Lower Hutt, to discuss this perspective, and take up the fight for socialism.

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