

# FISHING FOR A SOLUTION

## Nathan Tauwhare and Henare Parata



“The role of a Rangatira of an iwi (the iwi being Sealord in this case) is the wellbeing of its people, making sure they are being fed and protected.

We are pissed off with our Rangatira (Robin Hapi) and AFL, with their attitude towards their people and the lack of commitment towards their workers.

We have a company that is making a \$20 Million plus profit, yet they want to make more profit by taking from the workers. Profit before people. That's not right!”

Following Sealord's decision to close their Nelson plant night shift and lay off 160 workers, they came back to the bargaining table in May intending to take nearly \$1.8 Million from the employment conditions of the remaining workers.

The union negotiating team, led by Assistant National Secretary Neville Donaldson, told Sealord's management that they were willing to enter into genuine negotiations but they required the company to provide guarantees on job security as a pre-requisite.

The company said they were not willing to enter into any legally binding arrangements around job security.

Sealord tabled a list of claw backs, which they valued at a \$1.8 Million reduction in their workers entitlements. This included new employees being employed on less than existing staff, the removal or grand-parenting of many allowances, and the abolition of the double time overtime payment.

After five full days of negotiations in front of a Department of Labour mediator the company put a bottom line position to the union negotiating team.

Neville Donaldson said the union negotiating team thought long and hard about the company bottom line and put a proposal back that almost achieved the same level of savings that the company had said they required.

“We were gob smacked when the company management said they would accept our proposal but now wanted two other claw

backs on top of the “bottom line” presented by the company earlier. Even though the mediator confirmed we had reached the company's bottom line, the position from the company was ‘tough this is now what we require’.”

“The union negotiating team felt at this stage that it was a futile exercise continuing with the negotiations.

“The company showed that they could not be trusted to bargain honestly and it was not the first time they had simply change their position or information they provided without any explanation.”, said Neville.

The situation was further complicated by the fact the union advocate had made arrangements to go overseas on holiday months earlier and was not able to change the arrangements at short notice.

The union and company held a joint report back with the workers after which the members voted to cease negotiations till the union advocate returned from holiday.

The union suggested that in the meantime the company should draw up their position, including the wording around the provisions they wanted to be changed, some of which had already been agreed “in principle”.

The issues between Sealord and the union had now increased from two to nine as the company introduced additional claims not previously part of their list.

Neville Donaldson said that the union expressed major concerns about what it considered to be a lack of good faith.

“Sealord management responded by saying that it would be reporting to their board and getting guidance from them on the next steps.”

According to Neville, the Sealord Board has now stated that they have withdrawn the non-existent job security guarantee and will not be putting any capital expenditure into the Vickerman Street site.

“I don't think you need to be a rocket scientist to believe, like I do, that there was never any genuine intention by Sealords management to secure a long term commitment to the Nelson site.

“However, there does seem to be a commitment to finding reasons why it was everybody else's fault as to why the site may not last much longer”.

Sealord is now drafting a new collective employment agreement for the union to consider, with negotiations on this document due to re-commence in mid-September.