

Families on the Breadline

*By a concerned New Zealander,
who sadly, wishes
to remain anonymous*



I have just completed a stint working alongside a small group of shift workers who are literally living on the breadline, working very hard every day performing heavy manual labour, for minimum wage. They and their families are simply just existing.

With increasing fuel costs, on top of already expensive rents and food, the daily chatter often revolves around how hard it is to survive on such a meagre income. There is simply NOTHING left to have any quality of life, or to enjoy something special or to have a treat once a week. Sadly for every community, the consequence of low wages and the sharp increase in the cost of basic household staple food and fuel, results in an increase in crime.

Over the last few months the incidence of crime and theft offending has increased dramatically. There is a direct correlation between tougher economic conditions and the rise in reported offending. The reality is that people cannot survive, let alone expect to have any decent standard of living on the current minimum wage. So they resort to crime to survive and support their daily living requirements.

What is unpleasant to see, is that many of these people would not resort to crime if minimum wage conditions met their most basic living cost requirements, which would at least allow them to live with some dignity. Another sad side to this environment is the use of drugs. Cannabis tends to be the choice of substance and is in common use. Probably as a means of removing its users from the untenable situation they are in. It's relatively cheap, or it's easy to grow for free if you are totally destitute. There is an entire culture of drug abuse, and a mutual acceptance of this way of life, which seems to run through entire families, so children of each generation are locked into this cycle of destruction.

Basic health care is never attended to, because it's just too costly, and dental visits are a pipe dream. Something as simple as getting a drivers licence is too expensive so it's never achieved. So who do we blame? Of course society always places blame on the thief, the drug user or the dirty young lad walking the streets. Let's consider for a moment the responsibility of government, which surely has a duty to ensure its citizens have opportunities to work and earn a living, that gives them hope and a chance to change their circumstances. Also importantly, to earn an income which sustains them at a level which would

never require them to even consider resorting to crime. What I have also seen while working in these conditions is the rise in immigrant labour, which is driving down further the minimum wage. New immigrants who arrive in New Zealand will work for next to nothing just to get a job. They are used to surviving on far less than the average New Zealander would consider to be the bare minimum, and they are taking over these types of jobs at an alarming rate. This removes job opportunities from the market place for future generations of current New Zealanders who were born here, and their children. These jobs are gone for good.

What's your child going to do for a job when he or she leaves school? Especially if all the manual labour jobs which have sustained school leavers for years as their initial form of income are no longer available to the wider community. I am talking about the most basic manual labour jobs, which historically have always been available for people to perform so they can receive a basic wage, which would sustain them and their family.

Current Free Trade agreements, which remove small business manufacturing from the local economy, because they can no longer compete with the avalanche of cheap, mass produced garbage flooding in from overseas, have also removed the small production jobs from manufacturing shops, which used to employ young school leavers, learning a new trade. Couple this with an agreement, which allows the masses to work here, and multiply, and New Zealand society - you have a problem.

The irony here is this, we have a government walking into an abyss, with no realistic idea on how to manage the current climate change concerns, and who are happy to have manufacturing business and industry in New Zealand close down, so that these products can be made in countries which have NO climate change policy or costs associated with same! New Zealanders, we have an epidemic starting here, which requires an urgent change in direction.

**The consequence of low wages
and the sharp increase in the cost
of basic household staple food and
fuel results in an increase in crime.**

