



directors & editors guild of nz
ngā kaiwherawhera kiriata

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TO BE OR NOT TO BE – A REGISTERED UNION

In the middle of 2017, at a time when (a) we figured National was a shoe-in for another term and (b) revisiting the Hobbit Law hadn't been considered, I researched the idea of the DEGNZ becoming a registered union in the same way Equity NZ (Equity) and the NZ Writers Guild (NZWG) are. This was, in part, motivated by the fact that we are creating stronger links with the Australian Directors Guild and, to a lesser extent, the Directors Guild of America. Both of these are registered unions.

I talked to a number of individuals and bodies including the Council of Trade Unions (CTU) and concluded that, under current labour legislation (including the Hobbit Law), there were no obvious advantages in the Guild registering as a Union.

How quickly things can change.

- Labour has signalled its desire to introduce Minimum Rate and Conditions legislation across most if not all industries through Fair Pay Agreements.
- Government is looking at how it can address the issues it sees with the Hobbit Law and give more protection to contractors in all industries.
- The Film Industry Working Group representing all the Guilds has worked hard and come up with a set of recommendations to Government, which will be announced soon.

Although there is no guarantee the Government will accept the recommendations, we believe it seems pretty likely that the landscape is going to change. We want our Guild to be in the best position to meet these challenges.

More recently, the DEGNZ board held separate meetings with the CTU, Equity and NZWG to further explore the pros and cons of unionisation in light of the current government's commitment to improving the lot of workers.

One of the results of the last Guild survey of members gave added impetus to this review: 84% of members would be interested in the DEGNZ negotiating collective agreements with minimum rates and conditions.

Advantages of becoming registered:

- As a union we will be better positioned to be a representative body for directors and editors in collective bargaining.
- We will be more closely aligned as a union with our international colleagues, the Directors Guild of America, the Australian Directors Guild and the Directors Guild of Canada, all of whom are unions.
- As a member of the CTU, DEGNZ would be part of a wider movement and able to participate in how the world is evolving. e.g. equal pay legislation (currently in process), health and safety.
- We would be part of an international movement – the bigger picture: labour rights, human rights, protecting democracy and democratic freedoms.

Melissa Ansell-Bridges, ED of Equity NZ, & Alice Shearman, ED of NZ Writers Guild see these advantages:

- More lobbying power through the support of the union movement

- Professional development training (with financial support from the CTU)
- The ability to be involved at both a more global level and at a national level with the ability to get involved with Women's, Maori and Pacifica committees.

Find the support of the CTU valuable; their lawyers are great for advice.

Disadvantages:

- \$6.80 of each annual sub would go to CTU membership, giving the Guild slightly less to run its operation.
- Some current members may well have philosophical opposition to becoming a union

If any organisation is going to be negotiating Rates, Terms and Conditions for directors and editors, it should be our Guild, not some other group or Union looking to expand its influence.

I should point out that we might well not have to register with the CTU as a union to be a negotiating body. However, CTU membership brings with it access to their negotiating experience and legal advice.

Let's be clear, if the government carries through on its promises we will be forced to act as a union whether we want to or not. And if that is the case, we should go the whole hog and register with the CTU.

So, given (a) the changing landscape for labour legislation, and (b) the clearly expressed desire by a large majority of our membership for the DEGNZ to have the ability of bargain on its behalf, I believe it is time for the Directors and Editors Guild of New Zealand to register as a union and join the CTU.

Howard Taylor
President
DEGNZ