



NEGOTIATIONS: Talley's-owned Land Meat in Wanganui where workers' contracts have expired.

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Meat workers deserve a better deal — union

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It is feared Talley's is on track to walk away from bargaining and put all workers on individual contracts, New Zealand Meat Workers' Union organising director Darien Fenton said in Wanganui last week.

Ms Fenton was in the city to talk to meat workers and the Talley family — and expired workers' contracts were at the front of her mind.

The former Labour list MP was in town on Friday to train 40 union delegates from meat works across the region.

With her was the union's Wanganui branch secretary, John Woodhead, who said workers at Afco Imlay and Land Meat, both owned by the Talley's Group, had contracts that needed progressing. They had expired 15 months and nine months ago respectively and the employers had been "reluctant to negotiate".

After 12 months of talks over the Afco agreement, Talley's had brought eight new demands "of doubtful legality" to the table in February.

Labour Maori Development spokeswoman Nanaia Mahuta also shares the fears of the union



Darien Fenton

Ms Mahuta appealed to iwi chairs, meeting at Whangaehu Marae this week, to help resolve the situation.

Ms Fenton said Talley's response to talks was "not surprising". Michael Talley, one of the family members, had said it was "not in his DNA to talk to unions", she claimed, adding that the Talley's Group was the worst meat processing company to deal with.

"If people knew the extent of the bullying that goes on from this company, they would be horrified."

In one incident, a staff member who had asked their MP, on Facebook, to help settle an employment agreement had their job security threatened, she claimed. Workers were also allegedly penalised if they took

leaders. She said Talley's locked out workers for 89 days in a previous round of disputes which were later resolved with the help of Wanganui's Ken Mair.

sick days or belonged to a union.

Asked to respond to the allegations of bullying and intimidation, Afco operations manager Rowan Ogg made no comment.

"We are in the process of bargaining with the union for a collective that has expired, a process which is governed by a bargaining process agreement. In accordance with that agreement, we won't be making any media statement at this point."

Ms Fenton's visit was part of the Jobs That Count campaign, which is about valuing the skill and commitment of meat workers.

"We want New Zealanders to get to know meat workers and understand they contribute to our number two industry. They're not just slaves — they're human beings with lives and families."

Times are tough for them. The number of animals to be killed is reducing, and seasons are getting shorter.

When the animals run out, workers are expected to use up their holiday pay and exist through a two-week stand-down before they get help from Work and Income. Ms Fenton added they were effectively on "zero-hour" contracts.