

[About Us](#)[Information](#) >[Events & Campaigns](#)[News](#) >[Membership/Join](#) >[Contact Us](#) >[Links](#)[Search](#)[Site Map](#)[Home](#)[Your Rights, ERA2000](#)

## Boss's religious beliefs over-ride workers' rights

### It should be one law for all, says union

**Wellington, August 24, 2004:** The EPMU is to ask Parliament to rescind the right of Exclusive Brethren employers to bar union officials from their workplaces.

The union will lodge a late submission with the select committee considering changes to the Employment Relations Act asking that sections 23 and 24 of the act be repealed.

The move follows an attempt by the church to get the clause widened, and comes in the wake of the union being refused access to a South Auckland site to talk to workers whose Exclusive Brethren employer had banned them from speaking their own languages in the tea room.

National secretary Andrew Little said that sections 23 and 24 were being used to over-ride the basic rights of workers.

"This employer's wish to impose his religious practices on the workplace is costing the workers their rights," he said.

Under section 24 of the act, an employer who can prove he is a practising Exclusive Brethren may get an exemption certificate which effectively bars union officials from visiting.

At the moment, the clause applies only to individuals, and exemption certificates cannot be issued to companies.

A group of Exclusive Brethren has asked Parliament to widen the clause to include companies, and to allow Brethren employers to be free to "state their religious beliefs as they relate to their employment status" to employees and prospective employees.

Members of the group say that their belief in the "divine principles governing the master-servant relationship" means that the employing of unionised labour is in conflict with their consciences.

Little said that clauses 23 and 24 were a hang-over from the old days of compulsory unionism, and were designed to protect the rights of workers, not employers.

"They allowed workers who were Exclusive Brethren to get an exemption from being forced to join a union," he said.

"That is quite a different thing from allowing employers who are Exclusive Brethren to deny non-Brethren workers the right to be visited by unions."

The union is also considering challenging in court the exemption certificate given to Fort Richard Laboratories in South Auckland.