

The Jobs Letter

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Essential Information on an Essential Issue

KEY

CHRISTINE RANKIN EMPLOYMENT COURT CASE

"Mr Wintringham stated that I was going to be a "star" in the public service, and that after eight years as chief executive, he would move me to another position within the state services..."

— **Christine Rankin,
now unemployed**

"It is fair to say that the position demanded a level of sophistication that Mrs Rankin struggled from the outset to achieve."

— **Michael Wintringham,
State Services
Commissioner**

"This is turning into a clothing and gender issue, which I have never regarded it as being. For me, as a woman Member of Parliament, this is about quality of work, not fashion."

— **Ruth Dyson, Associate
Minister of Social Services**

"Someone should ask Christine Rankin which part of "three-year contract" she doesn't understand."

— **M.J. Lauranceson,
Tokoroa, Letter To Editor
New Zealand Herald**

The Rankin Case

• IT'S ALL OVER EXCEPT for the verdict. Christine Rankin has had her day in court. In doing so, the former boss of New Zealand's largest government department, Work and Income (Winz), has lit a fire of scorn and controversy under Wellington's bureaucratic and political elite. It is extremely rare for a senior public servant to take the government to court, and the Rankin Case has been the highest-profile employment grievance this country has ever seen.

The Employment Court hearing quickly became a "bonfire of the vanities" as government Ministers, opposition parties, leading public servants and media commentators were all drawn like moths to its flames.

The two-week hearing (see our *Diary*) grabbed all the headlines, the TV news leads, the commentaries, chatteries, and cartoons. We got to hear much more than we needed to know about the personal lives and opinions of Wellington's inner circle. And the lid was lifted on the previously invisible workings of Ministerial offices, government appointments, inquiries, and the State Services Commission. At times the whole spectacle seemed incredulous ... TV producers could not have written a better soap opera.

• Now that it is nearly over ... what have we learned?

— There were contested allegations of sexism and inappropriate comments on Christine Rankin's dress sense, and off-the-record deals being done by top public servants.

— The State Services Commissioner exercised "pastoral care" over his chief executives ... which led to the expectation that CEO contracts would be renewed if their performance was satisfactory.

— This expectation runs contrary to what the contracts actually say. Christine Rankin's fixed-term three-year contract as CEO contained no written expectation of re-appointment.

— Rankin's claim for damages will hinge on whether State Services Commissioner Michael Wintringham was transparent with her about the government's attitude to her future employment.

— Rankin may well come away with some compensation for her "distress, humiliation, loss of dignity and injury to feelings".

— This case will have an effect on the relationship between senior public servants and government politicians for some time to come.

• Perhaps we have also learned that this bonfire has been the price that comes with bringing an end to an era. The Labour Alliance government campaigned at the last election on the need to turn our state services away from the excesses of the corporate-style approach ... and the vanities that came with it. Their call for greater accountability has gained significant popular support.

It was always clear that Christine Rankin would be a prime target for change. Her critics have seen her as the most extreme example of corporate-style self-indulgence within our public service. That she headed up Winz — the government department charged with the support of our most vulnerable citizens — only made the excesses more unpalatable.

In time, this court case may come to be seen as not about earrings, fashion, and sexism in the state services ... or even about the fine-points of employment law and chief executive contracts. It may be seen as the political price for stepping away from the publicly-funded excesses of the 1990s, and towards reclaiming the "public service we need" in New Zealand today.

TIMELINE

- October 1998** — Department of Work and Income (Winz) established with Christine Rankin at the helm.
- Nov** — State Services Commission lists concerns about Rankin's leadership style.
Winz staff exposed for selling beneficiaries' private information to debt collectors and "repo men".
- Dec 1998 to Feb 1999** — State Services Commission conducts a review into security at Winz.
- Feb 1999** — Rubbish sacks of confidential Winz documents found dumped on roadside in Waikato. Prompts a second security review.
- Feb-April 1999** — The department bungles student allowances as students wait months to be paid.
- March** — Rankin told off after "attacking" Green MP Rod Donald through the media.
Education Review Office chief Judith Aitken writes to Wintringham complaining about Rankin's "inappropriate behaviour".
- April** — Criticisms of big spending on corporate advertisements and uniforms.
- June** — Rankin's self-assessment for her performance review "voluminous", according to Wintringham.
- July** — News of the Wairakei aircraft charter breaks. Another review is started, through the office of the auditor-general.
Rankin has an "extremely disturbing" meeting with opposition MP Steve Maharey. She tells Wintringham she fears for her career.
- Oct** — Auditor-general's report into the Wairakei affair. Rankin issued with a "formal warning" by Wintringham.
- Nov** — Performance review states Rankin has an "innovative and unorthodox style" but poses a risk of criticism of the department.
Revelations that Work and Income staff concocted a story to secretly pay more than \$100,000 to get rid of a senior executive.
- Dec** — Wintringham asked by the new Labour Government about the possibility of sacking Rankin. He says there are not yet grounds to.
- Jan-Feb 2000** — Management problems with student loans shows "no lessons learned" from the allowances bungle.
- Jan** — Revelations that Rankin had sacked an executive over the Wairakei affair and was paying \$100,000 plus in a settlement.
- May** — The Hunn inquiry is damning of the department.
Rankin told she would probably not be reappointed. More legal inquiries over whether she could be sacked.
- Nov** — Rankin formally told her contract would not be renewed.
- Dec** — Rankin's lawyer, Michael Quigg, asks Wintringham to reconsider his recommendation.
- Feb 2001** — A story featuring Rankin appears in the *Sunday Star-Times* angering Maharey and Wintringham.
- March** — Rankin writes to MP Sue Bradford threatening legal action, without telling Maharey.
- April** — Rankin told about her department being merged. She writes to Wintringham requesting her performance during 2000-2001 be reviewed. She threatens to sue.
- 25 June** — The Employment Court hearing begins.

Source — Michael Wintringham / *The Dominion* "How it all went wrong"
29 June 2001

DIARY

25 June 2001

- The Rankin Case begins in the Employment Court in Wellington. Winz CEO Christine Rankin is represented by her lawyer Michael Quigg. Rankin has previously told the media that her story will "shock and horrify" New Zealanders. State Services Commissioner Michael Wintringham is represented by a team of Crown lawyers led by Alan Galbraith. Chief Employment Court Judge Thomas Goddard will hear and rule on the case.
- Michael Quigg opens by telling the court that Wintringham had not treated Christine Rankin fairly and this caused her harm. Quigg says his intention is to prove that after its election, the Labour Party did not give Rankin a fair go, and that Michael Wintringham had treated her unfairly because of political interference from the government.
- Christine Rankin is the first to give evidence. Her testimony focuses on a meeting she had with Michael Wintringham on 25 May 2000. She says that Wintringham told her he was giving her advanced notice that she would not be reappointed as CEO of Winz when her contract finished the next year. Rankin claims that Wintringham told her that Prime Minister Helen Clark and Minister of State Services Trevor Mallard had said there was no way she would serve another term. She claims that Wintringham offered to get her a recruitment officer to help her find a position, suggesting Telecom, the World Bank, or a position in Australia.

Rankin also testifies about her relationship with the Minister of Social Services and Employment Steve Maharey. She says he came to her office in July 1999, while he was in the Opposition, in the midst of the Wairakei charter flight affair. She says Maharey told her and a colleague that he hated the way Winz did things, that they were out of touch with the taxpayers and those on welfare, and that there was no way they would be working for him. Rankin alleges that Maharey said she would be excellent fodder leading up to the election as she was unpopular and the organisation was in disarray. Rankin: "I was shaken and frightened this would spell the end of my career as a public servant".

Rankin then refers to other meetings she had with Maharey after the election. She says that Maharey had told her that a fresh start was needed and that he wanted her to change so that they could work together. He mentioned her earrings, sunglasses, skirts and hair. She says she had felt intimidated and victimised.

Rankin also says that Mark Prebble, head of the Prime Minister's Office, had said that her earrings were a sexual come-on and that at a previous meeting, when she had moved, he could distinguish her breasts and that made him feel very uncomfortable. She claims Prebble said her legs were a distraction. She also says that both Prebble and Wintringham told her that they would publicly deny off-the-record conversations they had with her.

Rankin says that in the last two years she has been frightened to go out in public. Rankin: "I've been spat at, hissed at, abused and yelled at. I've had bullets in the mail and death threats. My relationship with my husband, children, and friends has suffered. I don't feel free to do any of the things I did before."

- Rankin also reports that she did not currently have any job offers.
- During the last hour of the day, crown lawyer Alan Galbraith begins his cross-examination of Rankin by running through a list of problems Winz has had while she was CEO.

26 June 2001

- Alan Galbraith continues his cross-examination of Christine Rankin by arguing that the decision not to reappoint her as CEO of Winz was based on her performance and skills, not her appearance. Galbraith says that given her department's record, she should never have expected to be reappointed. He says that even the previous Minister of Employment Peter McCordle raised concerns about

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Rankin's leadership style and had identified her as a political risk. Galbraith says that soon after the election, Steve Maharey told Rankin that he was prepared to work with her providing she made some changes to her appearance and communication style, but that Rankin was resistant. That resistance was illustrated when, after the Minister had told Rankin that he wanted Winz to stay out of the media spotlight, Rankin agreed to a *Holmes* television interview and to be interviewed by the *Sunday Star-Times*.

Galbraith argues that Mark Prebble's comments about Rankin's appearance was frank advice about how she would best cope with the change of government. He says Prebble's intent was to point out to her that her personal style was critical.

Galbraith's cross-examination of Rankin focuses on a number of embarrassing incidents at Winz, including the Wairakei charter flight affair, security problems including Winz staff selling client information to debt collectors and confidential documents found on a roadside, problems with the student loan schemes, and her threat to sue Green MP Sue Bradford for defamation.

- Winz business development manager Helene Quilter gives evidence in support of Rankin. She says that she met with Rankin after the meetings she had had with Maharey, Wintringham and Prebble and that Rankin had been extremely distressed by them, saying she felt alone and afraid.

27 June 2001

- Christine Rankin's husband Alan Hogg testifies that their family lives in fear in the sense that their lives have been exposed and invaded. Hogg: "The normal social routines that we had as a husband and wife, simple things like going to the supermarket, meant that Christine was verbally abused." Hogg says he felt that his wife had been "hung out to dry" and had been deserted by Michael Wintringham.

- Winz operations manager Catherine Cooper gives evidence that the Ministerial team responsible for an inquiry into Winz, led by Don Hunn, became known as the "hanging committee". Cooper says the terms of reference for the inquiry were originally written by Trevor Mallard but were revised when Hunn said they were inappropriate because they focussed too much on the chief executive. Cooper also claims that Hunn had said that the first draft of the report was insufficient to have any basis for removing Christine Rankin as chief executive.

28 June 2001

- State Services Commissioner Michael Wintringham takes the stand giving evidence of a "disastrous" three years for Winz with Christine Rankin at the helm. Wintringham says that problems with Rankin had been so all-consuming that he had spent more time with her than he did with all the 36 other public sector chiefs combined.

Wintringham says that while Rankin was enthusiastic and had potential, leading the government's largest department demanded a level of sophistication that Rankin struggled to achieve. Wintringham notes that just one month after Winz was established, the department had a "self-protective control mentality" thrown up around it. He was also concerned that Rankin demanded total loyalty from her staff. He thought both of these things were symptomatic of an organisation in change, but says that three years later this attitude continues, illustrated by a recent petition signed by 65 Winz staff headed up: "Christine shines above all the others".

Wintringham says that the Wairakei charter flight affair was a monumental embarrassment to the government and that Rankin was the person ultimately responsible. He said this came on the back of problematic handling of student loans, confidential information being sold by Winz staff and rubbish bags of documents found on the side of a road in Waikato. He says her handling of an \$85 million computer project showed a lack of fiscal understanding.

Wintringham says he tried to help Rankin establish a good relationship with the government and defended her through the media, at

meetings, in speeches and letters to the editor. However, he told Rankin in November of his pending decision not to reappoint her. The next month the government proposed to merge the Social Policy Ministry with Winz and Wintringham asked Trevor Mallard what the government was looking for in a new chief executive. When he was told, Wintringham concluded Rankin was not suitable for the job.

He says his decision was reinforced by the fact she took a media interview against the expressed wishes of her Minister, she sent a letter to an MP threatening to sue for defamation, and the presentation of the "Christine shines above all others" petition from her staff to reinstate her. Wintringham says that no public service chief executive expected to be reappointed and that over the last decade, 20 had not been.

Wintringham says that at one point Rankin was so unhappy with her performance review that she wrote to him detailing her problems with it and threatened to sue.

29 June 2001

- Michael Wintringham is cross-examined by lawyer Michael Quigg and spends much of the day defending points he had made yesterday. Quigg disputes Wintringham's report of Rankin's leadership, saying that Rankin did not even recognise herself in the 90 pages of evidence he had presented. Quigg says that Rankin had no idea how endangered her job had been and that Wintringham's serious concerns had been kept secret from her. Quigg says that a letter Wintringham had sent to Rankin after the Wairakei charter flight affair did not communicate to her that she had failed to meet her performance standards as a chief executive. Wintringham considered this letter to be a formal and final employment warning but Quigg argues that Rankin didn't take the letter as a formal warning as it only had an oblique sentence saying he "would not protect her again".

2 July 2001

- Michael Wintringham takes the stand for a third day. He admits he avoided answering a query from a reporter regarding a "face doesn't fit" clause in Rankin's employment contract. The clause states that if a relationship with a Minister had irrevocably broken down, the employee may be dismissed. Wintringham says he felt that making this information public would have created problems for Rankin forging a relationship with her Minister. He says his answer was not lie but that he did not say all he knew and that in the same circumstances he would have taken the same line before a parliamentary select committee.

Wintringham tells the court that Rankin was not a credible candidate for reappointment because she did not have the confidence of her Minister or the necessary skills. He also says that Winz had become a lightning rod for criticism around behaviour and style of the department in a way that undermined the credibility of the whole public service.

3 July 2001

- Minister of Social Services Steve Maharey takes the stand saying that Christine Rankin was too resistant to change. Maharey says that Rankin took criticism personally, had a "perverse" attraction to the media, and simply did not have the right skills for the job. He says that once Michael Wintringham told him that a "face doesn't fit" clause could not remove Rankin, he set about developing a working relationship with her. Maharey says that the Labour Party had been elected on a mandate for change and that Winz, which was behaving more like a business than a welfare organisation, was an obvious place to start. Maharey says that once he was working with Rankin he made an effort to defend her against the call from other politicians for her head.

Referring to the Hunn report, Maharey says it was not an elaborate scheme to get rid of her. He says she took the review too personally and that she pushed against criticism rather than taking it on board. He says that was one of the main difficulties he had with her.

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Maharey: "I thought she lacked insight and maturity from a risk management perspective, particularly during the initial period of the government." He says that he would not have supported her reappointment if Wintringham had put her name forward.

- Don Hunn, a former State Services Commissioner and author of a Ministerial review of Winz, describes the response to his report by Rankin and senior managers of Winz as a battle that went on so long that both sides finally gave up. Hunn says he was confronted with denial and that there was very little criticism the department would accept. He says the "hanging committee" was a term he had used to describe to what the inquiry team was not going to be.
- Wira Gardiner, a former CEO of Te Puni Kokiri says that Christine Rankin had vision, energy and determination to succeed. He predicts that the decision not to reappoint her will destroy her career chances both in NZ and overseas.

4 July 2001

- Mark Prebble, the head of the Prime Minister's Department, testifies that the outfit Christine Rankin wore when he first met her was indecent and offensive and could have been seen as a sexual advance. Prebble says he agonised after that meeting how he would tell Rankin that her attire was inappropriate. When he did talk to Rankin about her appearance, Prebble says he made a comment about earrings having a sexual connotation. He says he told her that the right colour for a public servant was grey and that buying clothes from a chain store would be a safer option for her. He says his comment about the government being "presbyterian" meant that the government did not want to see flashy displays of commercial-type managerialism. He says Rankin responded positively to the meeting saying she would see if some low-cut necklines and short skirts might be eliminated from her workday wardrobe.
- Dame Margaret Bazley — one of NZ's longest serving senior public servants and former chief executive of the Department of Social Welfare — takes the stand. At the request of the government she has postponed her retirement for a few months to take on the top job at the new Ministry of Social Development while the search is on to fill the position. Bazley says she had been subject to the same threats as Christine Rankin during her career as a senior public servant. She testifies that bullets in the mail, death threats, threats of gang rape and burning in effigies "...go with the territory".

Bazley says it had always been the role of chief executives to manage their relationships with their Ministers and that chief executives had to "move heaven and earth" to make those relationships work. She says there has always been an unwritten rule that if relationship can't work, you resign.

Bazley says that working with a new government is very difficult. Bazley: "My way of getting through it, when I have experienced that, as I did with Minister of Social Services Steve Maharey, has been to sit down with the Minister and say, well, we've got a bit of a problem, and we have to try and work out how we're going to move forward."

Bazley appeared to be surprised to hear that things had gotten so bad that Rankin had asked for a meeting with the Solicitor-General. She said she had never thought of that as an option and that if things had gotten to that point, she would need to resign.

- After the Employment Court proceedings conclude for the day, Winz staff give Rankin a send-off party at the department's national office.

5 July 2001

- Christine Rankin's last day as Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Work and Income.
- At parliament, Michael Wintringham appears before the Government Administration Select Committee. Wintringham says that he was the one who first proposed the merging of Winz and the Ministry of Social Policy because neither were functioning as the Ministers wanted them to.

In light of his admission in the Employment Court earlier in the week that he had once avoided answering questions about a "face doesn't fit" clause in Christine Rankin's employment contract, Wintringham reassures the committee that he is a truthful person. Wintringham says however he would not necessarily volunteer additional information that would cause embarrassment to a Minister or would cause distress to an individual.

- National Party leader Jenny Shipley calls for Mark Prebble to be sacked. Shipley says she does not know how Prebble could effectively do his job given the sort of comments he made regarding Christine Rankin's attire.

6 July 2001

- An email circulates around NZ businesses urging women to don short skirts and big earrings to show solidarity with the embattled Winz boss. Our Media Watch reports few women actually wearing mini-skirts and big earrings on the day. However, in Britain, *The Guardian*, *The Times* and *The Independent* all run articles on the "dangly jangly" tale of Christine Rankin Day. According to the NZPA, the best media quips of the last week are all aired in the British press.

9 July 2001

- Crown lawyer Alan Galbraith tells the court that it was Christine Rankin's own assertion that the government would not let Wintringham reappoint her as Winz CEO that was "fatal" to her claim. Galbraith says it was Rankin rather than Wintringham who is responsible if there was any damage to her employment prospects.
- Ruth Dyson, Associate Minister of Social Services testifies that a meeting she attended with Rankin about a need for her to change her glasses, hair, earrings and skirts was about style and substance, not about the fashion of the day. Dyson says that if Rankin saw the meeting as an attack on her personal dress then she misunderstood the point. Dyson says that the message was about the public perception of the department and Rankin.
- PM Helen Clark says that Mark Prebble has been an outstanding policy advisor and that she is entirely happy with his performance at work. Clark says she has no cause to review Prebble's position as head of the Prime Minister's Department after the Rankin lawsuit.

10 July 2001

- Summing up for Christine Rankin, Michael Quigg argues: that Rankin had no idea her job was threatened to the extent her boss, Michael Wintringham, revealed in court and he had therefore failed to be a good employer; that Wintringham allowed himself to be politically influenced in his decision not to reappoint her; and that her fixed-term contract was not technically fixed.

Quigg also says that the claim is for \$1.24 million rather than the \$818,000 as earlier reported in the media. In all, Rankin gives the government three options: 1) \$1.24 million comprised of \$770,778 for three years' lost earnings, \$117,000 for six month's notice allegedly not given, \$300,000 for harm to future employment and \$50,000 for exemplary damages; 2) her job back, plus \$200,000 for humiliation and injury to feeling, and appropriate compensation for lost earnings; 3) her job back and her contract recognised as being of open tenure, not fixed, and \$50,000 for distress and humiliation.

- Crown defence lawyer Alan Galbraith summarises by saying that the State Services Act 1988 had been changed so that chief executives are now hired on short-term contracts. This is so they could be held accountable for their leadership and, on that basis, Rankin had no guarantee or expectation of reappointment and that Wintringham had every right to decide that she was not up to the job. Galbraith argues that Wintringham had publicly protected Rankin and given her counsel to the best of his ability and therefore was a good employer.
- It is expected that Judge Thomas Goddard will take several weeks to arrive at his decision.

VOICES

on the RANKIN CASE

"It was a much bigger issue than you, Mrs Rankin, much more important than the way you look. Don't you get it?"

— Alan Galbraith, Crown defense lawyer

"The media should have stayed with the substance – the true intent of Government's restructuring – and not some woman's dress style. We want to know how the Government should go about reclaiming its public service for the public good."

— Claire Breen, St Heliers, letter to the *New Zealand Herald*

"Rankin may be guilty of crimes of the wardrobe, but her clothing never affected her performance, only those of leery-eyed men around her. Her sins are not in the same league as the scandal of the Incis police computer, or the hocking off of umpteen public assets, like railways and electricity, or the systematic destruction of the health service."

— Sandra Coney, columnist *Sunday Star-Times*

"She had a tendency to personalize issues and did not seem to realise that there were bigger, more important issues than her. I was trying to convey a very simple message, a chief executive of a public service department whose role is to deliver services to people who, on the whole, can not afford expensive clothes, might want to give some thought to how they present in the public domain."

— Steve Maharey, Minister of Social Services and Employment

"I'm sorry, this person has failed in the job. This person has not managed to maintain an appropriate relationship with Ministers, this person has not projected the appropriate image of a public service chief executive and hasn't managed to carry forward the department. She presided over a succession of problems and has not managed to create the solutions required."

— Mark Prebble, head of the Prime Minister's Department

"If any chief executive that was reporting to me had ever said anything like he could see the breasts of a woman under a piece of clothing, I would have had him in my office and if it was so, I would have had the State Services Commission straight after and I would want to know every single provision available to me to get rid of him."

— Jenny Shipley, MP and leader of the National Party, concerning Mark Prebble

"I agree that Christine Rankin looks professional – but which profession?"

— D.L., Whangarei, letter to the *New Zealand Herald*

"She would say to me: 'I have done everything the new minister has wanted and more, and it won't go away.' There was no Michael Wintringham, her employer the State Services Commissioner, there for her. She stood alone."

— Allan Hogg, husband of Christine Rankin

"What I had not expected, however, was the on-going saga of problems that plagued the department and particularly Ms Rankin almost from the start of her term as chief executive. I have to say that I would expect a CEO of a government department of 5,000 staff on \$250,000 a year to take responsibility for effective communication with her Minister."

"[Her attitude] was bordering almost on an unwillingness to accept any criticism. I have rarely experienced that level of defensiveness in a chief executive. There was a mismatch between Mrs Rankin's skills and those the new chief executive would need."

— Michael Wintringham, State Services Commissioner.

"Christine Rankin has been wronged, but not as grievously as she claims. She might have suffered some ridiculous sexist insults by officials and ministers, but she also made a hash of the Winz job. Rankin was wrong if she thought her contract would be renewed, she had to be replaced. The claims about sexism, brutishness and tall poppies are colourful and no doubt contain some truth. But in the end they are irrelevant."

"The leader of the beneficiaries' department cannot waste money on flying bureaucrats to expensive resorts and expect to survive. Rankin also spent vast sums on re-branding the department, an entirely unnecessary expense based on the fatuous notion that Winz was a corporation operating in the marketplace. Rankin's cult-of-personality management style, full of hype, glitz and razzamatazz, was a caricature of the 1980's-style corporate evangelism. It was entirely out of place in the public service..."

— Editorial, *Sunday Star-Times*.

"Watching her give evidence raised dozens of questions. My first thought was: How could this woman ever have been appointed head of a government department? How much sympathy would she get from the many thousands of unemployed who have suffered at the hands of her department? How many students, remembering their long and painful wait for student grants, would join her in empathetic tears? Surely, a government should have the right to hire and fire the people in charge of implementing policy?"

— Bill Ralston, columnist *The Independent*

"Whatever the outcome of the Christine Rankin witch hunt, many of her senior staff in Napier consider her a very caring, enthusiastic person, always concerned with the many people trying to cope and often living on a pittance."

"Unfortunately, those judging her from 'ivory towers' often have little empathy with those people Rankin fully understood. No wonder she did not enjoy or attend meetings with often faceless bureaucrats who rarely related to anyone but their kind."

— Pat Magill, Napier, letter to the *Sunday Star-Times*

"In light of Mrs Rankin's employee's petition of support I offer a final solution. Let her clients have their say on the outcome, because the customer is always right."

— A.L., Mt Roskill, letter to the *New Zealand Herald*

VOICES

“Regardless of whether Christine Rankin snaffles more of the taxpayer’s money in addition to her huge salary, the remarkably elaborate grievance procedures available to her are staggering in contrast to the denial of normally recognised rights for those at the opposite end of the Winz spectrum — beneficiaries under investigation by the Winz benefit control unit.

“On the strength of anonymous tip-offs, often followed by snooping around the neighbourhood, unit investigators typically arrived unannounced on the accused’s doorstep, provide vague outlines of the alleged misdemeanours and ask for a statement or information to be supplied at short notice. They may also conduct, again at short notice, an interview with the accused on their own in a Winz office. If the beneficiary is fortunate enough to have access to a local support organisation (usually volunteers) he or she will have some informed advice, but set against the resources available to Winz’ trained investigators, even that may be a far cry from the concept of justice. If no offence is found, the accused may be left in a state of continuing anxiety with no confirmation of the outcome.

“The contrast with the hearing being conducted for Mrs Rankin’s benefit graphically illustrates the situation of one law for the rich and quite another for the poor...”

— **David Trantor, West Coast Unemployed Workers’ Rights Centre**

“I would like to know why I and many other students have not been called as witnesses in Christine Rankin’s case. Last year, like many others, I received my student loan almost three months after the study year started. This year the government’s policy of wiping off interest has not been implemented for many students because Winz has not transferred their loan accounts to Inland Revenue.

“I suggest that supporters of Ms Rankin, who think she is being victimized because of her clothes and earrings, have never been either students or beneficiaries whose lives have been blighted by procedural problems with Winz.”

— **Mike Batten, Sandringham, letter to the New Zealand Herald**

“It is true that her personal appearance and leadership style may have been spectacularly ill-advised for the chief executive of a government department ministering to the people out of money and down on their luck. It may also be true that Mrs Rankin’s deficiencies as chief executive of Winz were such that she occupied more of Mr Wintringham’s time than all the other public service bosses put together. And she may have been arrogant or naïve (or both) in not seeing that she was politically vulnerable because of the controversies rocking her department, such as the exorbitant Wairakei staff training exercise and the incompetent handling of student loans...”

“But what Chief Employment Court Judge Tom Goddard has to determine is whether Mrs Rankin was fairly treated in being denied a renewal of her contract, or whether — as she alleges — Mr Wintringham was influenced by vindictive politicians who simply didn’t like her style. As in so many Employment Court cases, the fairness of the process followed in dumping Mrs Rankin may assume greater importance than substantive issues such as the way she performed her job. In the final analysis, the legs and the earrings are merely peripheral.”

— **Editorial, The Evening Post**

“I had this contract to build a fence for \$8,000. I’ve built the fence but the silly people who signed the contract say they do not want to build another fence and won’t give me a new contract. I heard them comment that they didn’t like my automatic nailer, and they thought the stripes I have painted on my wagon were suggestive. So I’ll sue them for \$800,000, buy a boat and retire to the Bay of Islands with my devoted spouse (she is very supportive here) and we will live happily ever after. Have I got it right?”

— **D.R Jennings, Northcote, letter to the New Zealand Herald**

“Her passion and zeal for her job as chief executive was unparalleled. We’ll wait for the judgment. But it has certainly exposed some practices in the public service that might require some examination if the allegations are proven. The case demonstrated that every person, whether a chief executive or in a less senior position, deserved fair treatment.”

— **Michael Quigg, lawyer for Christine Rankin**

“[The suit] is obviously important to the government in terms of its relationship with chief executives. No government would want to see a re-run of this sort of performance each time a CEO is not re-employed.”

— **Alan Galbraith, Crown lawyer for Michael Wintringham**

“I feel free and I am very, very pleased to be going home to hide away for a while. I just want to say thank you to the thousands and thousands and thousands of people who’ve supported me. I think they’ve been very brave and I really appreciate that.”

— **Christine Rankin, on leaving the Employment Court**

Editor

Vivian Hutchinson

Associates

Dave Owens
Jo Howard
Rodger Smith