



American Income Life
Insurance Company
1701 K Street, N.W., Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20006
(202) 833-2030

TERRY O'SULLIVAN, President - Laborers International Union of North America, Chairman - AIL Labour Advisory Board
VICTOR KAMBER, Vice President - American Income Life Insurance Company, Executive Director - AIL Labour Advisory Board
ROGER SMITH, Chief Executive Officer - American Income Life Insurance Company, President - AIL Labour Advisory Board
DENISE BOWYER, Vice President - American Income Life Insurance Company, Secretary - AIL Labour Advisory Board
STEVE FRIEDLANDER, State General Agent - American Income Life Insurance Company



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New Zealand Labour News

Despite improvements in several areas in the new Trans Pacific Partnership treaty, New Zealand labour remained opposed to the deal. "We still have concerns with trade and investment agreements generally. A key outstanding issue for us is the need to protect the Government's ability to both regulate in the national interest, without question, and to apply preference for local firms to 'Buy Kiwi Made' and set higher standards and conditions in procurement such as ensuring tender winners pay a living wage," said Council of Trade Unions Secretary Sam Huggard. The country's unions cited the proposed EU-NZ free trade agreement as a model for greater transparency and improved approach to labour. "The CTU has never supported the TPPA. It is an agreement that is structurally biased towards commercial interests," he said.

The most pressing challenge facing New Zealand unions today involves the Future of Work (FOW) commission, declared NZCTU President Richard Wagstaff to delegates attending its biennial conference October 24-26 in Wellington. The CTU played an active role in the creation of the commission which, he said, is an "ideal framework" for unions to participate with the new government on developing a "people centred" agenda. "The future of work can look daunting if you believe some of the commentators making predictions about AI and new technology. Add to that the combined forces of climate change, demographic change and globalisation and it's obvious we can't bury our heads and hope it all goes away," he told delegates. The future holds both "real threats and opportunities," he warned. "The biggest single determinant of the impact of the FOW won't be climate change, globalisation, IT or demographics - it will be us and just how we respond to it."

Actors hailed the Labour government announcement to replace the controversial so-called "Hobbit law" which removed the right of film and television workers to organize collectively. John Key led National passed the bill in 2010 during an industrial dispute over the filming of The Hobbit. The government used the excuse that the dispute threatened production of the film in New Zealand to push through the bill in a bow to powerful Hollywood studios while

quietly increasing the film's subsidies by another \$30 million. Former Council of Trade Unions President Helen Kelly, who died of cancer last year, said the dispute was resolved prior to the government's action which made the bill and the extra money unnecessary. In a nasty public exchange, Minister of Economic Development, Gerry Brownlee, who had been involved in the negotiations, later went on television and called her a liar after she said the dispute was over. Kelly was vindicated when secret official papers uncovered in 2013 revealed the government and Hobbit director Sir Peter Jackson knew the dispute had been resolved at the same time as they were telling the public it had not.

National, Economic & Political Events

Promising "a significant change in New Zealand's policy," Climate Change Minister James Shaw announced to an international conference in Bonn recently that the country will be "one of the world's leading countries in the fight against climate change. "We aim to be a carbon neutral economy by 2050 - that would put us in the leading pack of the top 10 countries," he declared. Shaw and Pacific Peoples Minister Aupito William Sio attended the COP23 climate change meeting in Bonn, Germany where they highlighted the plight of low-lying Pacific nations such as Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, Fiji and Vanuatu. They later attended a meeting in Rome between the Pacific Island Forum leaders and Pope Francis. According to news reports, Shaw is already working on allowing Pacific people to migrate to New Zealand if climate change forces them to flee their homes.

The Labour-led government enjoyed a "honeymoon" with Kiwis as shown by a new Horizon Research survey that twice as many New Zealanders are feeling positive than negative about the new government. The poll of 1,068 adults nationwide was taken between October 24 and November 1. According to the findings, 49 per cent said the new government will personally affect them positively in the next three years, 24 per cent said it will affect them negatively and 28 per cent said the affect will be neither positive nor negative. The numbers do not vary by gender, but age drives changes in positive and negative feelings. Of those between 18-24, 65 per cent have positive feelings about the government while only 43 per cent of those aged 76 or older had positive feelings. Among income groups, 76 per cent of those earning \$200,000 per year felt the new government will have a negative effect on them, which falls to 68 per cent of those earning \$100,001-\$150,000 who are not positive. Positive feelings about the government peaks to 55 per cent among those earning between \$50,001 and \$70,000.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern personally took the new portfolio of "Minister for Child Poverty Reduction" and promised a bill to set child poverty reduction targets within her first 100 days in office, by February 2. The action led to expectations that welfare benefits for families with children will rise to their highest rates in real terms in at least 37 years. Benefits were cut in 1991 and raised in real terms twice since then, by Michael Cullen's Working for Families package in 2005, and by Bill English's \$25-a-week increase in all benefits for children from April last year. Current benefits and family tax credits for a sole parent with two children under 12 are still about \$30 a week below what they were before the 1991 cuts in real terms. As measured by those in households earning below half the median net household income after housing costs, the number of children in poverty more than doubled from 7 per cent in 1990 to 17 per cent in 1992, and was still 17 per cent last year.

International Labour News

Led by ten India central trade unions and several federations of workers and employees, more than 70,000 workers from across the nation gathered at Parliament Street, Delhi, November 9 to kick-off a three-day mobilization to protest the Modi government's anti-labour policies. They faced massive police force and parliamentary barricades. The demonstration is the first major protest by workers in Delhi after the Modi government came to power in 2014. An estimated 10.5 million workers nationwide participated in the mass protest which included a broad spectrum of private and public sector employees. The unrest is sparked by increasing unemployment, low economic growth, demonetisation and General Sales Tax. According to union leaders, the protestors want to "highlight government inaction to create more jobs and protect the interest of the working class".

Delegates attending the AFL-CIO 28th Constitutional Convention in St. Louis reelected Richard Trumka (UMWA) as president, Liz Shuler (IBEW) as secretary-treasurer and Tefere Gebre (UFCW) as executive vice president. They also elected 55 vice presidents, who will serve as the Executive Council for a four-year term. Trumka begins his third term as head of the labour federation since first elected in 2009. "I am humbled and honoured for the opportunity to serve the working families of the AFL-CIO," he said. Liz Shuler also begins her third term as secretary-treasurer, the second-highest position in the labour movement. First elected in 2009, she became the first woman elected as the federation's secretary-treasurer. Born in Gondar, Ethiopia, Gebre in 2013 became the first immigrant, political refugee, black man and local labour council leader elected as a national officer of the AFL-CIO.

More than 1,000 sanitation workers and local government employees blocked the main artery into Rawalpindi, Pakistan, for more than two hours November 14 to protest the latest shooting of a sanitation worker. Protesters burned tyres, chanted anti-government slogans and demanded local police provide additional protection to sanitation workers. Two government officials later met with union leaders and pledged more police protection in the future. The officials also said the provincial government would provide Rs1.8 million to each family of the deceased, besides providing them one year's salary. All Pakistan Municipal Workers and Local government employees Association Punjab Chapter Chairman Ghulam Ahmed Naz reported two gunmen in the morning of November 11 killed two sanitation workers in Nishtar Street of Sadiqabad and another was critically wounded. He said sanitation workers were the easy target of the killers in Rawalpindi as in the last six months five workers had been killed in terrorist attacks.

Regional and Local Union News

Senior doctors praised in-coming Health Minister David Clark's investigation of the Waikato DHA's decision on a multimillion-dollar tender for a virtual health technology, amid new revelations it was presented to and signed off by the board in one month. An American company, HealthTap, was selected by the Waikato DHB to provide virtual health services which is believed to have cost the board \$17 million and possibly much more, and failed to attract the targeted number of users. "The new Health Minister is to be commended for seeking answers to Waikato District Health Board's dubious decision to spend millions of dollars on a virtual health strategy," said Ian Powell, Executive Director of the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS). "It has taken place without the normal clinical scrutiny

that would occur over the use of new health technology, especially one that has been developed in a fundamentally different health system, and without apparent regard to a similar new technological device developed by GPs in Waikato." Clark said the process appeared "less robust" than standard practices.

Wellington railway workers held a 24-hour strike Thursday, November 16 to "defend their working conditions." Members of the Rail and Maritime Transport Union, the workers are employed by Transdev Wellington and Hyundai Rotem on Wellington's passenger rail network. Rail union general secretary Wayne Butson said the union has been trying to negotiate with Transdev and Hyundai Rotem since May. He said the union members voted to take the action because the company wants to remove long-standing terms and conditions in the workers' collective agreement. He explained Transdev and Hyundai Rotem, both multinational companies, approved the conditions last year when they won the contract for Wellington's service. Now, he charged, they are trying to increase profit by "squeezing frontline workers." The strike, which affected some 30,000 daily riders, would be the first industrial action since 1994 against the Wellington rail network for longer than two hours.

Unrest among transport workers spread to Auckland where unions representing train and bus drivers presented Auckland Transport with two petitions on November 10, with more than 5,000 signatures each, concerning job security, pay and working conditions. Bus drivers are represented by First Union and rail workers are members of the Rail and Maritime Union. They conducted the joint protest to call attention to the companies' take-back demands in current negotiations. Rail workers are concerned that more than 200 jobs will be lost if Auckland Transport and Transdev move forward with plans to replace "train managers" with "transport officers." Rail and Maritime Union organizer Stuart Johnstone warned public safety is at risk because there will be trains with only one driver and hundreds of people on board. First Union delegate Phil Morgan said bus drivers want a better tendering process for bus companies to prevent companies from eroding pay and working conditions to win a tender.