



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 Chairman Emeritus, American Income Life Insurance Company; President, AIL Labour Advisory Board
STEVE GREER Chief Executive Officer, American Income Life Agency Division
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

Public Service Association called on Labour Government to “deliver on its promises” of a Living Wage for all public service workers. The union cited new data which revealed “how many workers aren’t paid enough to live decently.” Nearly 1 in 10 staff at the Ministry of Justice are paid below the Living Wage, which PSA National Secretary Glenn Barclay said, “is very disappointing.” According to PSA, 329 Justice staff are paid below \$20.55 an hour, most of them administrative staff supporting Court Registry workers. “Without admin staff, the court system would grind to a halt,” Barclay said in a statement. “It’s imperative these workers are paid enough to feed and clothe their families, pay their bills and save for their retirement. We expect the Ministry to urgently address this in bargaining, which will begin shortly.” He said PSA research has identified more than 1000 public service employees who are paid below the Living Wage.

Results of a vote among members to hold two 24-hour nationwide strikes in July will be made at the end of May, announced the New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO). Nurses, health care assistants and midwives at New Zealand public hospitals began voting April 23 on the proposal. The vote ends May 25. “The commitment to secure safe patient care and a salary structure that incentivises nurses and midwives to remain in the profession has led the committee to this important decision. Strike action is a last resort if a settlement acceptable to our members cannot be achieved,” said Industrial Services Manager Cee Payne. The union has been engaged in protracted negotiations since mid-2017 for 27,000 NZNO members. According to news reports, they have twice rejected a 2 per cent offer which would not have kept pace with soaring costs for housing, petrol and food. NZNO chief executive Memo Musa said a contingency plan would be developed to take “all reasonable and practicable

steps” to ensure continued provision of essential or life preserving service if a strike action occurs.

New Zealand’s unions expressed concern over the numbers of workers suffering chronic illness at work. NZ Council of Trade Unions president Richard Wagstaff said an estimated 600 to 900 workers die every year due to work-related diseases, with many others suffering from non-terminal illnesses caused by work. "This has been a long-standing issue. Many work-related illnesses and diseases have a long latency period. Other illnesses, such as work-related asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, have been an issue for a very long time despite personal protective equipment being available and relatively inexpensive," he said. The National Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee (NOHSAC) estimates there are 17,000-20,000 new cases of work-related disease in New Zealand every year. Among the most common work-related chronic illnesses are cancer, respiratory disease, work/noise related hearing loss and heart disease. "Many of these diseases are as long-lasting in consequence as physical injuries that occur. Many are terminal." Wagstaff said as he called for greater awareness of risks in the workplace that cause work-related illnesses.

National, Economic & Political Events

The Government established a tri-partite forum to look at future challenges in the workforce that will include major business and trade union organisations, announced Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. Business New Zealand CEO Kirk Hope and the Council of Trade Unions (CTU) President Richard Wagstaff are members of the Future of Work forum. Finance Minister Grant Robertson represents the government and will lead the work. The group will look at challenges facing the economy like technological advancement including artificial intelligence and robotics, and the challenges of climate change and the need for a just transition to a low carbon economy. "No one has the same job for life any more. We may well have several careers so it's vital that workers are equipped with the foundation skills that will enable them to transition to other careers," the Prime Minister said. "This Government is keen to future-proof our economy, to have both budget sustainability and environmental sustainability, to prepare people for climate change and the fact that 40 per cent of today's jobs will not exist in a few decades."

Falling to a nine-year low, New Zealand’s quarterly unemployment rate in March dropped to 4.4 per cent, meeting market expectations. Joblessness in December was 4.5 per cent. Economic observers suggested the March report indicates the labour market remains tight. Union leaders countered wage growth is not keeping up with the number of jobs. “It’s good to see more jobs,” said CTU President Richard Wagstaff. “But the growth in wages is just happening too slowly. Working people need to see a more rapid rise in their pay because, since at least 2009, their wages have not kept up with the growth in the nation’s income.” He pointed out that 49 per cent of workers received no pay raise in the last year, the highest proportion since 2010. Wagstaff said Parliament’s current consideration of employment law changes supporting collective bargaining, a proven tool for wage growth, is “particularly significant.” “We aspire to decent jobs for all people willing and able to work, and New Zealanders should no longer tolerate a low wage society,” he said.

The National Party officially received the most political donations during the last election campaign, raking in nearly three times the money donated to Labour while failing to win a parliamentary majority. According to NZ Election 2017, National raised \$4,579,086.44 followed by Gareth Morgan's Opportunities Party, with \$2,344,110.50 (almost all from him). Labour, in third place, received \$1,611,073.77, and the Greens got \$848,468.97. Among the biggest donors to Labour were E tū Union, NZ Dairy Workers Union, the Maritime Union, and the NZ Rail & Maritime Transport Union. Election-related spending limits restricted the amount a party could spend which means it can hold onto the extra cash to spend for other party expenses, including by-elections. The highest turnout of enrolled voters since 2005 participated in the 2017 election, with 79.8 per cent casting ballots. National won 56 seats, Labour 46, New Zealand First nine, the Greens eight and ACT one.

International Labour News

Citing several fatalities on Australia's roads this year involving trucks, the Transport Workers Union called for more action from all levels of government to ensure companies are "doing the right thing and looking after" drivers. "This government needs to re-introduce an independent tribunal which can tackle the issues relating to the industry and then putting proper measures in place to protect drivers," said Transport Workers Union NSW assistant secretary Nick McIntosh. He said the industry is "definitely" the most dangerous and warned "there is a reason" drivers are tired and pushed to the limits on the road. "We will never knock back funding for roads infrastructure of course, but if bad roads were the problem as to why there are so many accidents and drivers dying, then it would be an easy fix. However, this is the very government that got rid of the tribunal which was in its early days when they came to power," he said. While there is not going to be "a simple solution" to stop truck drivers from dying on the roads, "It's something everyone should be concerned about because we're all sharing the road with our truck drivers," he said.

Teacher strikes swept across the U.S. over poor pay and underfunding for education. The strikes occurred in states governed by right-wing conservative Republicans where taxes have been cut for the wealthy. Striking West Virginia teachers won a 5 per cent pay raise in February inspiring educators in other states to protest. Oklahoma teachers shut down schools for nine days in April before winning an average \$6,100 raise and improved funding, paid for by the first major tax hike in the state in nearly 30 years. Arizona teachers returned to class on May 4 after ending a six-day strike that closed nearly all the state's 2,000-plus schools after the state legislature gave them a 20 percent salary raise over three years and some extra funding for public education. In Kentucky, educators shut down schools for a day in April to rally at the state Capitol in Frankfort. They convinced legislators to override the governor's veto of a two-year budget that would boost school funding by \$480 million through various tax hikes.

The 500 delegates attending the 18th National Triennial convention of the Public Service Alliance of Canada this month pledged to take greater action in support of the victims of domestic violence. According to the union, steps include "lobbying federal, provincial and

territorial governments for paid leave, reasonable unpaid leave, options for flexible work arrangements, guaranteed job security, and mandatory workplace training on domestic violence and sexual violence.” The resolution unanimously passed after “a number of delegates bravely shared their experience” of domestic violence and its impact. Delegates cited a national study commissioned by the Canadian Labour Congress which found that more than a third of people have experienced violence at the hands of an intimate partner or ex-partner. In other action, Chris Aylward was elected to his first term as National President.

Regional and Local Union News

E tū union slammed non-union Allied Security following the death of a security guard at Countdown Papakura. The union cited the firm as an example of security companies "trying to undercut each other" and lower prices. The victim, Serbian national Goran Milosavljevic, was assaulted and reportedly punched in the head by a 17-year hold who was charged with manslaughter. According to Industry Coordinator Jill Ovens, Allied Security took over the Countdown contract from First Security last year and refuses to engage with the union. "We try to initiate for bargaining to get into discussions about things like health and safety and training which would protect the guards more. But they refuse to engage with the union," she said. Owens explained the union does training programmes with employers such as Armourguard and First Security. "When we asked Allied to be part of this to upskill their staff, they said that if the client requires them to have an NZQA qualification, they just go and hire someone who's already got it," she said.

Participating in their first strike action, 16 Go Bus school bus drivers in Te Awamutu and Otorohanga walked picket lines May 7 outside Go Bus Te Awamutu with Otorohanga members in support, reported FIRST Union. Their strike follows action from NZ Bus and Pavlovich members who also walked off the job in recent weeks over low pay and concerning work conditions. FIRST Union's Jared Abbott explained workers are upset over low pay and they "just want a fair pay deal." He reported the company recently proposed a wage increase that only put them a few cents above the minimum wage. "About 80 per cent of these drivers are older people who've retired and returned to work part time on school bus routes. Go Bus should be ashamed." The fact that the drivers who live in conservative towns were forced to strike should be a "red flag" to the employer. "These are conservative towns; none of these members ever believed they'd be holding up placards on a picket line, but the utter injustice in their lives has caused them to act." He predicted further strike action this month.