

June 2021, Vol. 12 No. 5

TERRY O'SULLIVAN President, Laborers' International Union of North America; Chairman, AIL Labour Advisory Board

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SUSAN FULDAUER Division Vice President, Public Relations, American Income Life Division; Secretary, AIL Labour Advisory Board

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NEW ZEALAND LABOUR NEWS



NZNO Members will strike June 9th (NZNO)

Nurse Set for Nationwide Strike Action June 9th

About 30,000 nurses at district health boards (DHBs) around New Zealand are due to strike for eight hours on Wednesday, June 9th.

"[Nurses nationally] are feeling that working in the health sector is a huge challenge and has been for some time, due to their staffing issues (and) they don't believe the pay rates reflect the work they're required to do.

"At the moment there is a pretty stressed workforce out there that is pretty angry about how they feel they've been treated," said New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) industrial organiser Glenda Alexander.

The DHBs have made a late pay offer to nurses which is being considered. A previous offer described as a 1.4 per cent pay rise was rejected.

Around the country, the strike will include Covid vaccinators, but not managed isolation and quarantine staffers. The organisation's members also include midwives, health care assistants and kaimahi hauora.

New Zealand's nurses say they're working in "horrific and unsafe staffing conditions" amid a nationwide midwife shortage, and have been warning people will die at overstretched emergency departments during the busy winter months ahead.

Nurses' reluctance to strike has long been used as emotional blackmail by those who employ them, and the decision to strike should be taken as a stark warning of the dire state of New Zealand's health system.

If the strike goes ahead, it will be only the second time in more than 30 years that district health board (DHB) nurses have walked off the job. The last, in 2018, saw up to 8000 planned procedures cancelled or postponed across the country, and nurses offering only life-preserving services for the duration.

Waikato DHB asked last week for the nurses to make an exception and to call off the strike there as it grappled with the fallout from a crippling cyber outage.

But Waikato nurses felt strongly they wanted to be part of any nationwide strike action, said NZNO's Alexander. "It's a big deal for nurses anyway to take industrial action, but then to take it nationally - across 20 DHBs - it's massive."



(Tom Lee/Stuff)

There was always hope there was a way around the strike but, in the meantime, she said, the plans remain in place.

Industrial Action Plan for June 9, 2021: [Nationwide NZNO Strike Action Schedule](#)

Whakatāne Mill Will Stay Open

The 80-year-old Whakatane Mill will stay open under new owners, providing widespread relief to employees after a tense few months during which workers prepared for the worst.



Whakatane Mill will stay open
(WAATEANews)

First Union delegate Rua Williams says it's back to the future, with the Smurfit Consortium saying it will resume production of high quality folding box board, carrier board and food service board, dropping the liquid packaging board produced under its current owner SIG Combibloc.

Williams, however, doubted there could be as good an outcome at the area's mill in Kawerau, where Norske Skog is looking to shed up to 160 jobs because of a worldwide drop in demand for newsprint.

Unions Support Government Scheme To Provide Social Insurance

The **Public Service Association** (PSA) announced its strong support for government plans to develop a social insurance scheme that will protect all workers, particularly those employed in sectors prone to change and displacement.

The government's new policy idea describes an Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC)-style system that would cover a large chunk of wages for a period of time when people lose their jobs and are looking for other work.

"Many people lost their jobs due to Covid-19 last year, and for some it was the first time they ever had to rely on the welfare system for support. New Zealanders understand now more than ever that hard times can arrive rapidly and unexpectedly," says PSA National Secretary Kerry Davies.

Combined with active labour market policies such as training and targeted skill development, social insurance will help people transition to new jobs and limit the damage caused by job losses.

"Entire communities can be devastated when a local workplace closes, said **E tū** member Sam Gribben, citing the mill in Whakatane which, prior to this week's agreement, was "on shaky ground." A social insurance program would not have stopped the mill closing, but it would mean "hundreds of workers, and all the people who rely on their wages, are much better off for much longer if they (did) close and is a step towards the 'just transition' unions have been advocating."



Unions will work together with Business NZ and the government to explore an ACC-style system, which could provide 80 per cent of a workers' income

for a period after they lose their job. Over fifty per cent of unemployed people find new jobs within three months, and ninety per cent do so within a year.

Finance Minister Grant Robertson said the social insurance scheme would complement existing welfare benefits (Stuff)

"When large numbers of New Zealanders lose their jobs, some groups tend to be hit harder than others. Social insurance protects everyone, but it offers particularly important protection to the most vulnerable," said PSA's Davies.

Social insurance will also assist in challenging labour market inequities. Last year between March and September the number of unemployed women rose 28 per cent, compared to a 16 per cent rise for men.

E tū's Gribben said, "Even in a country where we managed to avoid the social and economic catastrophe of others, it was, as usual, precarious and vulnerable workers and notably women, who ended up worst off."

He added, "Social insurance is not a policy that will solve poverty or bring justice for all beneficiaries. It will not solve income inequality in or out of work. We have to keep up those fights. In the meantime, it could seriously improve the lives of most people when they lose their jobs, and the lives of the people who depend on them."



(MUNZ)

South Island Floods Highlight Need for Coastal Shipping

Hundreds of people have had to evacuate their homes last week as New Zealand's South Island was hit with what has been described as a one-in-100-year deluge of rain.

"The terrible floods in Canterbury have disrupted and damaged the land-based supply chain," said Maritime Union of New Zealand (MUNZ) National Secretary Craig Harrison, adding that while natural disasters like earthquakes and flooding were a feature of life in New Zealand, coastal

shipping could provide an essential lifeline to regions in future events.

Harrison said that, on top of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still causing massive disruption and congestion, it is clear that with climate change there would be ongoing and increased severe weather events, and there needed to be redundancies built into the system.

"We are entering into a new and uncertain age and the focus needs to go onto supply chain security," said Harrison, adding, "If we don't get this right, we are going to see ongoing disruption that will have dire economic consequences and could potentially endanger communities."

While the government now recognizes the need for a true multi-mode transport sector, and there is now widespread support within the logistics, transport and ports sectors for rebuilding New Zealand owned and operated coastal shipping, "the need to deliver is immediate," said Harrison.

Coming to the AID of Labour Partners

While the last year has been tough for Kiwis, our partners in developing countries in Asia and the Pacific region have been hardest hit. They are facing a perfect storm of Covid-19, economic recession and rising authoritarianism. Millions are facing poverty as a result.

Those fighting back to protect worker rights and demand a fair recovery for all struggling against the odds need our solidarity now more than ever.

UnionAID has launched a special appeal so you can play your part. By donating to UnionAID you will be providing our union partners with the resources and tools they need to organise, to provide education and

training and build strong unions for working people.

Together we can help them hold the big brands to account during the pandemic and sustain their brave campaigns for human rights against authoritarian and military governments in Myanmar, Thailand and the Philippines.

Please [donate to UnionAID](#) so our union and community partners around the region can keep up the fight for a better post-Covid world.



Garment workers in Bangladesh protest against union busting and redundancy (UnionAID)

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR NEWS

Airline Caterer Uses Pandemic to Strip Seniority from Laid Off Workers

United States, New York City, New York. As reported in LaborPress

Like most businesses in travel, airline caterer DO & CO laid off workers when the COVID pandemic hit in early 2020. United Food and Commercial Workers Local 2013 negotiated a deal that employees recalled within three months would keep all their seniority and benefits, and later got that extended to seven months. Workers recalled after that were out of luck. The company brought them back as new hires, deleting all the seniority and vacation time they had previously earned.

"I got recalled, and I started as a new employee," Bibi, an equipment packer said during a May 26th protest outside a company facility near John F. Kennedy International Airport. "I lost five years." The biggest loss, she said, was that she had enough time on the job to get three weeks of vacation each year. Now, she'll have to work another year to get back to one week. "It wasn't our fault, the pandemic," she said.

The more than 500 workers at the facility, in an industrial area of road-sand piles and hotels converted into homeless shelters wedged between the airport and the Belt Parkway, were laid off early in the pandemic.

Some were recalled before the agreement was expired, but so far, 43 workers have been stripped of their seniority, said UFCW Local 2013 field director Francine Streich, as will others recalled in the future.



(LaborPress)

"Nobody could've imagined just how long the impact on this pandemic would have on the country and the world," Local 2013 President Louis Mark Carotenuto said in a statement. "DO & CO needs to restore the SENIORITY of each and every recalled worker who was laid off as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic and they need to do so NOW!" The company, he added, was doing the recall "in a way that not only takes advantage of these workers - it kicks them while they're down!"

DO & CO, a multinational catering company based in Vienna, Austria, argues that its actions were perfectly legal, because the seven-month recall agreement had expired.

"DO & CO and UFCW Local 2013 are parties to a valid collective bargaining agreement (CBA)," Alexander Kappner, corporate counsel in the company's Los Angeles office, said in a statement to LaborPress. "The CBA specifies in detail under what conditions an employee preserves or loses seniority, and what the eligibility requirements for benefits are...To the extent the organized workforce seeks changes to the CBA, DO & CO representatives remain available for bargaining over such changes."

The company, he said, was "not aware of any UFCW Local 2013 rally or picketing."

Management at the Queens site certainly was aware, however. The rally was scheduled to start at the 2:30 p.m. shift change, when the morning workers got out - but supervisors kept them working. Queens Borough President Donovan Richards went into the facility to find out what was going on and was told no manager was on duty. When the rally ended at 3:30, the morning-shift workers were still confined inside.

State Senator James Sanders and Assembly member Khaleel Anderson (D-Queens) plan to introduce legislation that would require employers who recall laid-off workers to preserve their seniority and benefits.

"If we stand together and have good communication, we will get what we are asking for," shop steward Pedro Garcia said.

Air Canada's \$10 Million in Bonuses for Management is 'Morally Bankrupt' After Mass Layoffs, says Union

Canada, Toronto. As reported in the Toronto Star

Air Canada's decision to award major bonuses to top executives and management has drawn the ire of the airline's largest workers union, which says the move is "morally bankrupt" after the company laid off thousands of workers during the pandemic.

In a note to shareholders on Monday, Air Canada revealed it had paid \$10 million in bonuses and stock awards to its highest earners while the company was negotiating a bailout package with the federal government.

The company had a disastrous fiscal year, reporting a \$3.8-billion operating loss after passenger travel declined 73 per cent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, its board of directors found room in the budget to approve \$20-million in "Pandemic Mitigation Bonuses" for management's "exceptional performance" during the pandemic.

The company's board of directors distributed only half of the \$20 million in bonuses awards, and the top five executives received \$1.84 million in total awards. Then-CEO Calin Rovinescu, who stepped down in February, earned total pay of \$9.25 million for the year.

"Paying out millions in executive bonuses while they kick their workers to the curb and ask the taxpayer to bail them out isn't just wrong, it's morally bankrupt," said Mark Hancock, national president of the **Canadian Union of Public Employees**, which represents 10,000 flight attendants at Air Canada and Air Canada Rouge.

The company has axed half its workforce since the start of the pandemic to cut down on costs. It also tapped into Ottawa's Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy program to access roughly \$656 million in support funding.

The bonuses, meant to offset the salary cuts the management team took in 2020, were distributed while the company was calling for a bailout from Ottawa. The government agreed to the package on several strict terms, including guaranteed refunds for customers and a cap on executive pay.

But the terms of the deal do not apply retroactively. Moving forward, under the bailout agreement, executive compensation at Air Canada must be capped at \$1 million per year until all government loans are repaid.



(Toronto Star)

Wesley Lesosky, president of the Air Canada component of CUPE, said the bonuses are offensive to workers laid off by the company during the pandemic. "This truly feels like we're being kicked when we're already down," he said. "They lined their own pockets. It's just shameless."

News of the bonuses reached Parliament Hill on Tuesday, sparking fierce debate among politicians over the terms of the Liberal government's aid package. "Why was this government incapable of negotiating an agreement that focused on Canadian workers?" asked Conservative MP Stephanie Kusie.

Bloc Québécois MP Xavier Barsalou-Duval asked Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland if Ottawa would withhold public funding for Air Canada until it backpedaled on the bonuses.

Freeland dodged the question, but the terms of the bailout have already been negotiated, and the company handed out the bonuses last December, well before they were disclosed to the public. She defended Ottawa's aid package, noting that the deal includes measures aimed at protecting jobs at the company.

"The aviation sector was hard hit by the pandemic, and we're determined to support the thousands of people in the sector," said Freeland, who also serves as finance minister.

Air Canada also defended its actions, saying in a statement that Rovinescu's decision to lay off 20,000 workers was "the most painful of his life. A balanced approach was required, reducing costs where we could but also spending to motivate and reward talent and retain our core capabilities for the future."

Like many CEOs and top executives during the pandemic, Air Canada's C-suite did take pay cuts during the pandemic. Rovinescu's total 2020 pay of \$9.25 million represents a decline from \$12.87 million the year before.

His successor, Michael Rousseau, earned \$2.93 million as the deputy chief executive in 2020.

In a note to shareholders, the company said Air Canada's senior executive team "reacted urgently, decisively and skilfully to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the company."

Jordan Agricultural Workers Win Landmark Rights

Jordan. As reported by the Solidarity Center

Agricultural workers in Jordan for the first time have fundamental protections on the job, including guarantees for safe and decent working conditions, following a two-year campaign by the **Agricultural Workers Union** in Jordan and its allies that resulted in passage of a historic regulation covering the agricultural sector.

"This is quite a landmark in Jordan. It's the first time this type of legislation has passed," says Hamada Abu Nijmeh, director of the Jordan-based Workers' House for Studies. Under the regulation, any provision not mentioned falls under purview of national labour code.



(Solidarity Center)

The law applies to all workplaces that employ more than three agricultural workers, who now will receive 14 days annual paid leave and 14 days paid sick leave (or more, in cases of serious illness). Women are guaranteed 10 weeks paid maternity leave and there are now first-ever provisions for overtime pay. Significantly, the legislation also covers migrant agricultural workers, who frequently are not protected by countries' labor laws.

Prior to passage of the regulation this month, there were no mandated safety inspections of farming facilities, leaving workers

vulnerable to dangerous and unhealthy working conditions, such as exposure to poisonous pesticides. Agricultural workers, most of whom do not have formal labor contracts and are part of the country's vast informal economy, were paid extremely low wages with no health insurance or other social protections.

Working long hours, they were not guaranteed a day off during the week and not paid overtime. They were denied the freedom to form unions-the Agricultural Workers Union is not recognized by the government. Migrant workers still do not have the right to form unions under the new law.

Although a labor law covering agricultural workers was passed in 2008, the government never moved to put it in place, says Mithqal Zinati, union president. But as the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted essential workers like those who literally feed the world, the government became more receptive to the union's campaign to ensure decent working conditions in the vineyards and fields.

"The agricultural sector is the food basket, the key source of stability that needs to be given priority to contribute to the stability of Jordanian state itself," says Abu Nijmeh. "Part and parcel of that is to provide protection of workers. We told [the government] if you want to see this sector successful, you need to provide its protection."

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

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