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NEW ZEALAND LABOUR NEWS



PM Ardern announces lockdown (youtube)

New Zealand Lockdown and Labour

On 17 August Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern ordered a snap nationwide lockdown in response to an outbreak of the coronavirus Delta variant in Auckland.

Under the level four alert, businesses and schools are closed, aside from essential services such as supermarkets and pharmacies.

About 1.7 million Aucklanders will remain in strict level four lockdown for at least another two weeks, while restrictions for the remainder of the country will begin to ease.

In the interim, New Zealand's working families struggle under the renewed challenges and hope that employers will act responsibly during the crisis.

E tū to Big Business: No Nonsense This Lockdown

E tū says it won't be sitting by if big corporates try to shirk their duty to pay workers their proper wages during the Alert Level 4 lockdown.

Last year, E tū was concerned by some major companies that accepted the Government's wage subsidy but treated workers badly - cutting wages, making them use annual leave, and layoffs - and still turned a profit.

A worker from a large infrastructure company that was among those that claimed the most from the Government says so far there's been no news of conditions during this lockdown. "It's shaping up to be the same as last year. They are avoiding us - not getting in touch with workers," he said.

Some workers have heavy financial commitments - such as supporting family overseas, paying for medical care, or are the sole providers in their families - and can't afford to take the same huge pay cut they did last year.



E tū calls out Big Business (E tū)

E tū negotiation specialist Joe Gallagher says companies need to honour employment law and pay their workers as agreed in their collective agreements or individual employment contracts. "Workers in Aotearoa New Zealand pulled us through this crisis last time, and a lot of the large companies that were 'down and out' went on to record big profits."

Gallagher said it's unacceptable for companies to take advantage of the situation to get away with paying their workers less, leaving them dependent on legal measures to recoup what they should have been paid in the first place. "Companies need to honour and respect employment law - do the right thing now and pay workers 100%."

Foodstuffs Awards Bonus During Lockdown

Supermarket giant Foodstuffs has reinstated a 10 per cent bonus for all its essential and key employees during the alert level four lockdown.



The country's largest grocery retailer said that covers front-line and distribution centre employees across all Foodstuffs retail stores nationwide, including New World Pak'nSave, Four Square, Gilmours, Trents, Raeward Fresh, distribution centres and a small number of other impacted employees.

The company's North Island chief executive Chris Quin said it was their way of showing gratitude to their staff for their work. "Our number one priority is to look after our teams and supporting them during these challenging times. We are also working to increase staff access to vaccines," and to assist essential team members with daycare for their families.

[Learn More](#) (First Union)

"Foodstuffs & Countdown have implemented a 10 per cent bonus for workers during the lockdown. We think that's great, but we think they need to lock in that lockdown pay, and value essential workers by at least paying them the living wage," said **FIRST Union** Retail, Finance and Commerce Secretary Tali Williams. "We've made some progress with wages in Countdown and some Pak n' Saves, but there's still a long way to go. We rely on essential workers to stay on the frontline, while we are at home in our bubbles, and they need to be valued with at least living wages."

SkyCity Workers Get Boost

SkyCity Entertainment Group has agreed to a proposed \$2.90 an hour pay raise for the lowest-paid employees, from \$20.10 an hour to \$23.

SkyCity confirmed discussions with **E tū Union**, **Unite Union** and its employees on individual employment agreements about the introduction of the SkyCity sustainable wage.

The agreement means a full-time waged employee at SkyCity Auckland who now earns \$20.10/hour, will receive an extra \$116 per week or \$6032/year before tax, and all SkyCity Auckland waged employees will receive at least a 3 per cent increase, effective from 1 December.

The company employs about 2500 people but had laid off hundreds after the level four alert and, more recently, another 100 during a restructuring. "In the end it was around 1000 people" let go by the NZX listed company in the last two years, said Unite Union organizer Joe Carolan.



(Unite Union)

Last March, SkyCity said it was cutting wages by 20 per cent, offering redundancies and giving two weeks' notice that all annual leave must be taken. Yet profitability had risen and the company had received about \$31m from the state in the Work & Income wage subsidy, recalled Carolan.

In a statement, the company said, "SkyCity modelled the cost of the sustainable wage on employee demographics, cost of living in each of the regions in which we operate including utilities and housing, transport, and household costs. SkyCity...has a commitment to make a positive difference to the lives of our people. Offering a sustainable wage within our communities is a big part of that."

Unite Union advocate Mike Treen welcomed the pay hike, saying, "This is a good start" to bargaining for the union collective agreement which was scheduled to start at the end of July. "We also think the correct response to a supposed labour shortage is to start by paying at least a living wage and it's really positive to see a major hospitality employer do the right thing here."

Maritime Union of New Zealand Supports Vaccination Campaign

The **Maritime Union of New Zealand** (MUNZ) reiterated its support for the Government's move, first announced in July, to make COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for port workers.



[Click!](#) (MUNZ)

In an August 30th statement, MUNZ National Secretary Craig Harrison says misinformation is threatening health and safety in ports, and that MUNZ recommended and supported its members being vaccinated for the COVID-19 virus.

Under the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Amendments Order 2021, vaccination for port workers on or around ships will now become mandatory. Privately employed border workers must have had their first dose by 30 September 2021. Recent figures show vaccination rates in ports at approximately 78 per cent in the industry.

Harrison also said the Union recognises and respects the freedom of choice for its members and would work with employers and members to try and resolve any situations where jobs are in jeopardy. The need to protect port workers and the community, however, was the main concern for the union.

"The public health order has been made, and as good health and safety practice, both employers and workers must abide by it."

RMTU Expresses Concern Over New Tender Operator

On 27 August, Auckland Transport announced that the tender for the city's rail services from 2022 had been awarded to new operator Auckland One Rail (AOR), a joint venture comprising ComfortDelGro Transit Pte Ltd (CDGT) and UGL Rail Pty Ltd (UGL Rail).

The unsuccessful tenderer was Aka Tangata Ltd (ATL), a consortium comprising Transdev NZ Ltd, John Holland NZ Ltd and CAF NZ Ltd.

Rail and Maritime Transport Union General Secretary Wayne Butson says workers will be watching the approach of the new operators closely, saying, "More uncertainty at a time when we already face disruption from maintenance issues and COVID is not a good situation."

He noted that the collective employment agreements with Transdev and CAF will expire shortly and bargaining will soon commence for a new multi-employer agreement. "It is of concern to our members that no effort was made by the successful bidder to meet with the Union during the tender process."



(RMTU)

Butson said the unity and strong collective will of rail workers in Auckland has meant retaining decent terms and conditions of employment, and this approach would continue regardless of the employer.

Increased Sick Leave A Win For Working People

On 24 July, under changes to the Holiday Act, the minimum number of sick leave days that employees are entitled to doubled from five to 10.

Almost half the workforce will have their sick leave doubled as a result of the changes, which were one of Labour's campaign promises during the 2020 election, and highlighted after the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of workers staying at home when sick.

Public Service Association (PSA) National Secretary Kerry Davies, who represents the nation's largest union, said, "The doubling of statutory sick leave entitlement from five days to 10 will make a huge difference to hundreds of thousands of working people. COVID has shown us very clearly how important it is to stay home and recover when we are unwell - and not risk the health of our colleagues by 'battling on' and coming in to work."



(NZCTU)

"This will also make a big difference to parents and those who care for whānau, who need to take leave when their dependents are sick. Being able to take sick leave, rather than annual leave, means people can use annual leave for its intended purpose - rest, relaxation and recuperation."

Sick leave increases from the anniversary of entitlement. The law says you are not entitled to sick leave until you have had six months service with your employer. So, from 24 July 2021 the entitlement will increase when each individual hits their 'sick leave' anniversary, and will apply to all permanent employees - regardless of whether they are part-time or full-time.

"Many union members already get the benefit of union negotiated leave in excess of five days...but that success in collective negotiations does not stop us advocating for every other worker," Davies said. Prior to the order, New Zealand was ranked 14th by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for the number of sick leave days. New Zealand now joins Australia, Switzerland and seven other countries in the OECD with ten day or more of sick leave. The country with the lowest allocation was the US, and Luxembourg has the most paid sick days with 77.

NZ Labour Mourns the Passing of United States AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka

The **New Zealand Council of Trade Unions** sends messages of condolences to the United States trade union movement with the death of President Richard Trumka of the **AFL-CIO** (The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organization), the sister organisation of the NZCTU.

"Trumka was a powerhouse, he dedicated his life to improving the working lives of people working in the United States. His sudden and unexpected death is shocking for the international trade union movement," said CTU President Richard Wagstaff.

Trumka had been president of the AFL-CIO, a group of more than 50 unions representing 12.5 million members, since 2009. A third-generation coal miner who rose to power through the United Mine Workers, Trumka had become one of the most powerful labor leaders in the country and a key ally of Democrats in Washington, having worked in some capacity with every Democratic White House over the last 30 years.



(AFL-CIO)

"Trumka's leadership and vision for a better future for working people in the United States was an inspiration. He will be missed throughout the international trade union movement," Wagstaff said.

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR NEWS

Liz Shuler Becomes First Woman To Lead The AFL-CIO

United States, as reported by NPR.

Liz Shuler will serve as President of the **AFL-CIO**, following the sudden death of longtime president Richard Trumka last month.

The AFL-CIO Executive Council elected her to the position on Friday. Shuler is the federation's first woman president. Following Trumka's death, Shuler was serving as Acting President, and had served as Secretary-Treasurer, the No. 2 office, since 2009.

"I am humbled, honored and ready to guide this federation forward," Shuler said in a statement. "This is a moment for us to lead societal transformations - to leverage our power to bring women and people of color from the margins to the center-at work, in our unions and in our economy, and to be the center of gravity for incubating new ideas that will unleash unprecedented union growth," she added.



New AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler (AFL-CIO)

Shuler takes on the top position at a time when the organisation has to make a decision between continuing to support the passage of legislation including the pro-union *Protecting the Right to Organize Act* that Trumka heavily supported, or embracing the broadening of the labor movement in the US.

Before joining AFL-CIO, Shuler spent a large portion of her career with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. She started as a local organiser with IBEW in 1993. By 2004, she had worked her way up to assistant to the international president, a position she stayed in until 2009 when she campaigned with Trumka for the top spots in the AFL-CIO.

Fred Redmond, International Vice President of the United Steelworkers, was elected to serve as Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO. Redmond is the first African American to hold the second-ranking office.

"I could not be more excited to get to work with President Shuler so we can build on the labor movement's legacy of change, writing a new chapter that brings the promise of union membership to workers across this country," Redmond said in a statement. "This is the right team at the right time to help bring about the economic and social justice America is hungry for."

Both Shuler and Redmond will be in their positions until June of next year when they will have a chance to be reelected by delegates at the AFL-CIO convention. Shuler has already said she will run for reelection in 2022.

Unite Union Elected Sharon Graham First Female General Secretary

United Kingdom. As reported by the Guardian.

The **Unite Union** is expected to develop a calmer but more distant relationship with the Labour party after the election of the leftwinger Sharon Graham as its first female General Secretary on Wednesday.

Graham, who was the surprise winner in the three-way contest with 37.7 per cent of the vote, was elected on a manifesto that said "we have tried our political project within Labour - it has failed". She has said she intends to prioritise workplace organising in her new role.

Graham will replace Len McCluskey, who has run Unite since 2011. McCluskey publicly backed Steve Turner, the Unite Assistant General Secretary, but he came in second with 33.8 per cent of the vote. Gerard Coyne, seen as the centrist candidate, received 28.5 per cent of the vote.

The Labour leader, Keir Starmer, welcomed Graham's victory by tweeting: "Congratulations to @UniteSharon on her election as General Secretary of Unite - the first ever woman to hold that role. I'm looking forward to working



together to improve the lives of working people across the country."

*Graham was considered
underdog (Sharon Graham
Campaign)*

Graham said she had won because Unite members wanted change. In a reference to McCluskey's focus on internal Labour politics, she said: "Unite members ... have spoken. They have rallied, in their tens of thousands, to our demand that Unite should get back to the workplace and deliver what it says on the trade union tin - a relentless fight for jobs, pay and conditions."

Graham has been a union organiser for more than 20 years and at Unite she has headed the organising and leverage department, which specialises in taking on hostile employers - including by putting pressure on multinationals through linking local disputes to a company's interests worldwide. Unite claims her team has a "100% winning track record."

Province Reverses Privatization of Cleaning and Dietary Work in B.C. Hospitals

Vancouver, B.C. As reported by HEU

Health Minister Adrian Dix announced that more than 4,000 privatised hospital cleaning and dietary workers will be brought back in-house as health authority employees, ending a 20-year privatisation policy that drove down wages for women and workers of colour, and fragmented the health care team.

The **Hospital Employees' Union** (HEU) says the move will help restore fairness and stability in the health care system. "Reuniting the health care team is a giant step towards restoring equity and justice for health care workers and repairing the damage done to health care delivery," said HEU Secretary-Business Manager Meena Brisard.



(HEU CUPE)

In 2002, the former B.C. Liberal government introduced legislation that stripped health care workers' collective agreements of job security provisions and excluded them from the full protection of provincial labour laws.

Thousands of health care workers - mostly women - were fired as health authorities contracted out hospital services. Those workers were invited to reapply for their jobs at half the wages by the corporations that won lucrative service contracts.

Privatisation of this work has had an outsized impact on the economic security of women (more than four out of five of the impacted workforce) and racialised workers.

Today, they earn less than they did during the SARS epidemic 18 years ago. In 2018, the B.C. legislature voted unanimously to repeal the 2002 law that enabled contracting out... paving the way for the works to be brought in-house.

"It's a move that will improve recruitment and retention rates for these critical jobs, and will ensure greater worker and patient safety," said Brisard.

HEU is B.C.'s largest health union representing more than 50,000 workers in various health occupations and settings, including more than 4,000 contracted hospital support workers currently employed by multinational corporations under contract to Vancouver Coastal Health, Vancouver Island Health, Fraser Health and the Provincial Health Services authorities.

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